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OR,
The Spot Saint's Mission.

BY J. C. COWDRICK,
AUTHOR OF "KENTUCKY JEAN," "BLUE-GRASS
BURT," "THE GIANT CUPID," "REDLIGHT
RALPH," "BROADWAY BILLY," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

"THE SPOT SAINT FROM SCARECROW."
"SINNERS, repent."

Instantly every man in the room looked toward the door, where stood one of the most peculiar-looking specimens of humanity it had ever been their fortune—good or bad—to behold.

He was a man not less than fifty years of age, his hair and beard were plentifully sprinkled with white, and his face bore all the wrinkles that fifty hot summers and as many cold and stormy winters can bestow. His eyes were deep-set and small, and were half-concealed beneath shaggy brows, but they were as bright and piercing as the eyes of an eagle. He wore, to begin at the top, the remains of what had once been a high silk hat, but which had now settled down until it had the appearance of a partly closed accordion. His coat was the ragged

SABLE HORSE AND SABLE RIDER HAD THE APPEARANCE OF A STATUE CARVED
FROM ONE PIECE OF SABLE MARBLE.

relic of what had evidently once been a moderately-expensive beaver overcoat, but which now looked as though it had seen wonderfully hard service. His trousers we must omit describing, because the coat reached nearly to the top of his boots, and they were not visible except here and there where a hole in that tattered garment revealed them. And the boots—they were sadly worn, being down at the heels and gaping at the toes.

With his long coat buttoned up close to his chin, and with his solemn expression of face, this man had, with a slight effort of the imagination, something of a had-been-clerical appearance; but taken all in all, he had more the appearance of an inveterate and chronic "hard case."

The time was evening, in the early autumn of 1880; the place was the pretty little town of "Silver Nugget, in — county, Colorado; and the scene was within the "Green Bottle" Saloon.

The saloon was well filled, the Green Bottle being one of the most popular places of its kind in the town, and all present were doing their best to get the enjoyment out of the fleeting hour they possibly could. Several had just ranged themselves at the bar, and were about to "crook their elbows" and "gulp their poison," when they were checked by the words we quote.

For some seconds no one spoke, but all gazed at the stranger, and he was the first to break the silence. Stretching forth his right arm and pointing to the men at the bar, he repeated:

"Sinners, repent!"

This broke the spell, and the words were greeted with a loud burst of laughter.

"Repent o' what, stranger?" inquired one of the men at the bar.

"Repent of what you are about to do, oh sinner," was the reply. "Put the vile liquor down."

"Ha, ha, ha!" the questioner laughed, "jest what we're about ter do, stranger, fer a fact. We'll put 'er down, hey, boys? Jest crook ag'in, pard, an' we'll drink to th' stranger's health. Here's to ye, stranger; a long life an'— Ha, ha, ha! jest th' idee, by Satan! I'll give th' stranger a name. Here, feller-citizens, here's to him—here's to his health—here's to th' Spot Saint from Scarecrow!"

Instantly a howl of laughter burst from the crowd—a howl such as the Green Bottle had never heard before, and while the main body of the crowd continued to whoop and hurrah, the men at the bar drank the toast.

The stranger put up both arms and waved to the crowd to be silent, but it was some time before he could make himself heard. At length, however, the hilarious merriment abated a little, and then he was heard to exclaim:

"Repent, oh sinners! repent, repent!"

"Nary a repent!" cried he who had bestowed the wonderful sobriquet. "That's yer name, stranger, an' it'll stick to ye like a brother. When we name a feller-creetur out in these parts, stranger, we name him fer keeps, an' I've given ye a name that ye'll carry with ye to th' grave. Th' 'Spot Saint from Scarecrow.' Ha, ha, ha, ha!"

Again the room rung with laughter.

"Ye made a mistake though, Dan," one of the other drinkers remarked.

"How's that?"

"Why, ye call him th' Spot Saint from Scarecrow; ain't he a scarecrow himself?"

"Ha, ha, ha! I don't know but you're right, Jim; mebbly I could 'a' hit him a leetle closer; but I guess there's no help fer it now. When we once name a man out here, he's named."

How true this is, is well known.

"Sinners—worldlings—idolaters—repent!"

The stranger had now advanced into the room, and pausing at a table where four men were about to resume a game of cards which his coming in had interrupted, he uttered his exhortatory command again.

"Repent o' what, Scarecrow?" one player demanded none too mildly.

"Repent of what you are about to do, oh, sinner! Put up your money and throw down the cards."

Another burst of laughter greeted this.

"Why, you old fool! that's jest what we are doin'," the player cried. "Our money is already up, an' if you will keep yer eyes on us fer about a minute I reckon ye'll see th' cards come down."

"Repent, repent!"

"Look here, stranger," called the first speaker—he named Dan, "what is yer proper name when you're at home?"

"My name, sir, is Hannibal Long," was the respectful reply.

"An' where d'ye hail from?"

"From everywhere and nowhere. I am like the wind; I come and I go."

"That ain't a very satisfyin' answer to a straight question, stranger."

"It is the truth."

"What I want ter git at is—whar d'ye come from now? Whar did ye last make tracks from? What town did ye last honor with yer presence?"

"You mean what place do I call 'home'?"

"Thar! now ye've got it."

"Well, I do not mind telling you that. The camp where I am best known is a little town called 'Scarecrow,' and there I am known as the 'Spot Saint.'"

This reply was made in as earnest and straightforward a manner as though it were the very essence of truth.

Again there was a laugh, not at the stranger this time, however, but at his persistent interrogator.

This man, the questioner, was one Dan Gilbert, a big, overbearing bully toward strangers and all who did not know him. Those who did know him knew his weak point, which was that he had no "sand" to back up his dire threats and vengeful vows. He was, to use the popular phrase, "all wind." In size, though, he was almost a giant, and few strangers indeed ever braved his anger.

On this occasion he glared at the man before him in silent amazement for some moments, and then cried:

"By Satan, stranger, if I thought ye were tryin' ter make game o' me, I'd chaw ye all up! D'ye know who I be?"

"No," the old man answered, "I have not that honor."

"Wal, you'll be likely ter find out, I kin tell ye, if ye try any funny work."

"Sinner, repent!"

"Now look here, stranger, do you mean fer to say you are from a town called 'Scarecrow,' an' that yer handle is 'Spot Saint'?"

"Do I look like a liar, my friend?" the old man quietly asked.

"That ain't to th' p'int!" the bully persisted, now growing warm with anger. "What I want ter know is—be you th' Spot Saint from Scarecrow?"

"Bless me, my friend, but you do need a good deal of assuring upon a simple point. Have you not already declared that such is my name?"

The tables were now completely turned. The laugh was no longer against the stranger, but against Dan Gilbert.

"Look here, you old tramp!" taking a step forward as he spoke, "if you r'ile me up it won't go easy with ye, I tell ye! I asked ye a civil question, an' by Satan I mean fer ter have a civil answer!"

"I have answered your questions, my good fellow. You asked my name and I gave it. You asked where I come from and I told you. What more would you have? If I have overlooked any inquiry, pray repeat it."

The old man spoke slowly, calmly and distinctly, his deep, sonorous voice filling the room grandly.

"Dast your homely, wrinkled old mug!" cried the bully in rage, "you know well enough what I want, an' now if ye don't talk straight I'll eat ye, boots an' all. I want ter know if that name I gev ye is yer name."

"My son of Gamaliel, it is."

"An' you're from Scarecrow?"

"I am."

"An' you're called th' Spot Saint?"

"I am, as I have assured you before, and as you, too, have assured all present. I now decline to answer any further questions upon the subject."

"Oh! ye do, do ye?" shouted the enraged blusterer—enraged because the laugh of the crowd had been turned against him, and because he was not carrying everything in his own high-handed way; "well, we'll see 'bout that. What I want ter know is—was that yer handle afore I gev it to ye? an' now if you don't answer me it'll be th' worst fer ye."

"I have said that I shall answer no further questions upon the subject. What I say, I mean."

"Fiends! D'ye mean ter say ye won't answer?—won't answer me? I'll see whether ye won't or not! If you kem to this town ter git into a muss, stranger, ye couldn't 'a' hit a better man. An' it seems ter me that's jest what ye did come here fer. You must want ter commit suicide. I guess ye never heard o' me—th' long-clawed grizzly, did ye? Now you answer my question, stranger, or by Satan I'll lift yer scalp!"

The attention of the whole crowd was now centered upon Dan Gilbert and the stranger. Dan's prowess—or more properly his lack of that quality—was well known to most of the lookers-on, and all were curious to see how the affair would terminate.

There was an awful calmness about the old pilgrim that seemed to presage ill for Mr. Gilbert.

Waving his hand gently before the angry man, as though to cool his temper, the old man repeated his admonition.

"Sinner, repent."

So great became the bully's rage then that he turned red and white alternately, and glared at the stranger as though he would crush him.

"D'ye mean ter defy me?" he cried; "d'ye really want ter die? Stranger, I'll give ye jest one minute ter answer my question, an' then if ye don't, by Satan I'll bore ye!"

The old man did not flinch, nor was there a tremor in a single muscle. Indeed, he looked

his adversary squarely in the eyes and repeated:

"Son of Anak, repent!"

Dan Gilbert had thrust his hand behind him as he made his threat, and he now partly drew a revolver from his belt.

"Stranger," he cautioned, "don't ye say them words ag'in."

They were said instantly.

"Sinner, repent."

Out came the revolver, and fairly trembling in his rage—and perhaps a little with secret fear, too, Dan hissed:

"Stranger, I see ye want ter die. I see ye've come here a-purpose ter commit suicide. Say them words jest once more, if ye dare."

"Sinner, repent."

As quick as a flash the stranger's hand had slipped through one of the convenient holes in his tattered coat; as quickly it slipped out again; and then, as he repeated the forbidden words, he backed them up with a revolver aimed straight at Dan Gilbert's head.

CHAPTER II.

THE BLACK RIDER.

"STRANGER, I reckon I'll have ter."

These, after gazing silently for a moment into the dark tube of the Spot Saint's revolver, were the words with which Dan Gilbert acknowledged his defeat. And he put his own revolver away at once.

"Bound ter git holt o' th' wrong man once in a while, hey, Dan?" some one shouted.

"Bully fer th' Spot Saint!" exclaimed some one else.

"I am sorry, gentlemen," the Spot Saint avowed, "that so unpleasant a scene should have taken place, but it was not provoked by me. I am no brawler or disturber of the peace, and it is seldom indeed that I have occasion to use a weapon of defense. When such an occasion presents itself, though, the weapon is always ready, and I am not wholly unacquainted with its use. If the gentleman is satisfied, now, and will not trouble me any further, I will return my weapon to its place; if not, if he—"

"Oh! I'm satisfied, stranger, I'm satisfied!" Dan quickly exclaimed, as the bright little eyes of the old man turned upon him again, seeming to burn into his very being.

"Very well, then," thrusting his revolver back through the hole in his coat, "let our little misunderstanding be forgotten. I have no doubt that you are a better man than I, but, be that as it may, I have no desire to quarrel with you. I bear no ill will against you, my friend, and if to-morrow I can do a friendly turn for you, you have but to command me. Will you shake hands?"

Dan hardly knew what to do. This man's peculiar way was something entirely new to him. He hesitated a moment, however, and then he gave his hand, saying:

"Sartain I will, stranger, sartain! I don't bear you no ill will nuther, an' so we'll let our little difficulty be a thing o' th' past."

The pair shook hands, and Dan added:

"Won't ye take a little somethin', stran—"

"No, no, my friend," the Spot Saint cried, putting up both hands as though he would wave the bar and its array of bottles out of sight, "I have reformed. Do not tempt me. I am divorced from the folly and weaknesses of the world, and have no desire to wed them again. Pray do not tempt me."

"All right, stranger, all right; jest as ye please; I sha'n't press ye."

"Because he's too mighty quick with his gun?" queried Jerry Lynch, the proprietor of the saloon, who was leaning upon his bar, with folded arms.

"Not so much that, Jerry," one of the crowd corrected, "as it is because he's repented."

Another laugh followed.

"By th' way, stranger, an' meanin' no offense," said the vanquished bully, presently, "might I inquire what your callin' is? that is ter say—what is yer business?"

"You may, assuredly. Calling—business—all such have I laid aside, as they are considered in a worldly sense. I have a mission to perform. I am here to reform the world. I am here to dethrone Evil. I am here to save you. Repent, oh, sinners! repent, repent!"

"That's what's the matter, sinners; you want to repent!"

Again all eyes sought the door.

There stood—how shall we describe him?—one of Nature's most perfect specimens of magnificent manhood. He was a young man, not more than twenty-five, perhaps, and was strikingly good-looking both of face and of form. He was tall, straight and well proportioned, and every outline of his shapely form indicated strength and agility. His complexion was dark, he sported a graceful mustache, and a wealth of dark-brown hair, such as a woman might envy, fell in a heavy mass upon his broad shoulders. His every feature was perfect, and his eyes, black and bright, shone like twin diamonds. He was dressed in a neatly-fitting suit of the best corduroy, dark—almost black—blue in color, and cut in a highly stylish manner. His hat was of the softest felt, broad-brimmed and

shapely, and white. His boots were of the finest material in the line of French "calf," and displayed his shapely feet to good advantage.

The most noticeable feature of his attire, however, was his necktie. Not because it was large, flashy, or "loud," for of these it was neither; but because its bright colors contrasted so strikingly to the sombrousness of his suit, as seen by lamplight, and to the whiteness of his hat. It was a small tie, and modestly worn, but it possessed all the brilliant hues of the rainbow. In fact, it was a creditable imitation of the rainbow—an imitation in woven silk.

This young stranger stood just inside the door, his hands thrust into his trowsers pockets, his feet slightly apart, and his hat pushed up from his forehead. A smile rested upon his face, and his bright eyes sparkled with good-nature.

"Hello!" exclaimed Dan Gilbert, "here's another stranger! What might *your* handle be, mister?"

"Well, my friend," the young man replied, "it might be almost anything, I suppose, but it isn't. When I used to go to school, I believe the master chalked me down as Robert Ransom."

"Robert Ransom, eh? Rob fer short, I s'pose. Where d'ye hail from?"

"From down Texas way."

"Texas, eh? Well, now, Mr. Ransom, you need *another* name. I've jist had the honor to christen this gentleman," indicating the Spot Saint, "an' I may as well christen you. When a stranger strikes this part of th' wild an' woolly West, th' first duty of th' citizens is ter give him a becomin' name. Now s'pose I call you th'—"

"Just wait a moment, my friend," the young stranger interrupted, putting up his hand, "let me twitter a few words. I am greatly obliged to you for the kindly interest you manifest in my welfare, but I must object to being named by you, for two reasons. One is, you might not give me a suitable sobriquet, and the other, because I already possess about all the burlesque nicknames that I can carry around with me conveniently."

"Oh! then ye've got yer every-day Western name a'ready, have ye?"

"That's the Gospel truth; I have."

"Any objections ter tellin' us what it is? Ye see, we don't jest cotton to full names out heur; what we want is a sort o' free-an'-easy title that we ain't likely to fergit. If ye're already fixed out, o' course it won't be necessary ter name ye ag'in."

"Well, my friend, I am known as 'Rainbow Rob, the Tulip from Texas.'"

Mr. Gilbert stepped back speechless.

"Do you think it will answer for all ordinary requirements?" the young stranger asked.

"It—it'll do!"

"If you can improve upon it any, I might be induced to change it."

"No—no, I guess I can't go any better this deal."

"Very well, then; I'll carry the old burden. And now, gentlemen, one and all, step up and poison yourselves at my expense."

Instantly there was a general stampede toward the bar.

"Oh sinners! repent, *repent!*" and with both arms uplifted the Spot Saint tried to wave the crowd back.

He might as well have tried to stop a cyclone with his breath.

"That reminds me," cried Dan Gilbert, while the crowd surged before the bar; "I must introduce you two strangers. Mr. Rainbow Rob, Tulip from Texas, allow me th' pleasure o' presentin' ye to Mr. Hannibal Long, th' Spot Saint from Scarecrow. Mr. Long, Mr. Rainbow; Mr. Tulip, Mr. Scarecrow; Mr.—"

"I hope the pleasure of this rather unique introduction is mutual, Mr. Long," the young sport interrupted, as he extended his hand.

"I hope it is, Mr. Ransom," was the Spot Saint's response, as he gave his hand at once and willingly.

The two shook hands.

"You are something of a crank, I take it," the young stranger remarked, while his hand still grasped the other's.

"Be keerful, Tulip!" Dan continued, in an undertone; "he's lightnin' on th' draw."

"So men call me," the Spot Saint made answer, without taking offense, "but such I am not. I have a mission to perform, a work to do. I am here to reform the world. I am here to dethrone Evil. Oh sinner! repent."

"Repent! I! Lord love your honest old heart, what have I to repent of? I'm as honest as the sun. Self-praise is a lame horse, I allow, but I'm giving you the truth in a solid square. I'm on the side of right every time."

"Yes, but you have just lured men to taste the poison cup."

"Lured them? Ha, ha, ha! Excuse my laughing, Saint, but the idea really amuses me. Why, half this crowd was at the bar before I had the words out of my mouth."

"I do not dispute that; still you oppose the good work I would do."

"Old man, your task is an impossibility. You—"

There was a sudden and great commotion

near the door; loud and heavy steps resounded through the room—steps so heavy that the floor fairly trembled beneath them, and, to their wonder and amazement, the crowd beheld a masked man entering the room on horseback.

Both horse and rider were as black as midnight. The horse was a handsome animal, and the man, clothed entirely in black, even to hat, mask and gloves, sat upon its back with such an easy grace that he looked to be a part of the noble animal itself. The saddle, too, was black, as was every part of its belongings, and the bridle.

The moment they were within the room both horse and rider saluted the crowd, the former by raising itself upon its hind legs for a moment, and the latter by a wave of the hand; then the rider rode straight to the bar, the crowd opening a way for him with alacrity.

"Whose treat is this?" the black rider asked.

"It is mine," answered Rainbow Rob, promptly.

"It includes all comers?"

"It does, sir."

"Very well. Mr. Barkeeper, give me a glass of ale and a small glass of brandy."

"Yes, sir."

Jerry set about providing the drinks at once, and in a moment they were ready.

All present were curious to know what the masked man intended to do with the two so uncongenial liquors.

Taking the brandy for himself, the black rider directed Jerry to set the ale before the horse.

The bartender did so, and the horse at once took the glass into its mouth.

"Stranger, your health," the masked man then saluted, and, as he raised the brandy to his lips, through a mouth-place in his mask, the horse raised its head and poured the ale down its throat.

A loud cheer greeted the performance, and the cheer was repeated when the horse lowered its head and replaced the glass upon the bar uninjured.

The masked rider tossed his glass to the barkeeper, and then turned his horse from the bar and started down the room.

In the rear end of the room were four pool-tables.

Riding down the left-hand side of the room, and around three of these tables, as they stood in a square, the man touched his horse lightly as he approached the fourth table, and the animal, with an easy effort, vaulted upon it.

CHAPTER III.

A COOL NERVE.

VERILY the citizens of Silver Nugget were witnessing exploits which to the most of them were new.

The Spot Saint and Rainbow Rob were for the time being forgotten, and the interest of the crowd was centered upon the daring black rider.

The moment the horse landed upon the pool-table, it straightened up and stood motionless, and sable horse and sable rider had the appearance of a statue carved from one piece of sable marble.

For some moments they remained thus, and the crowd was silent.

Then the voice of Jerry Lynch, the proprietor, was heard exclaiming:

"Good heavens! mister, you'll ruin that table. Take your horse off of it at once."

"Ha, ha, ha! don't be alarmed, my good friend!" the daring masquerader exclaimed, as he looked around.

"But, you'll tear the cloth! You'll break the slabs!"

"Then you'll have to charge it to profit and loss."

"Be heavens, I'll charge nothin'! and I want ye to get down from there instanter!"

"Which I shall not do until I get ready."

"You'll do it before you're ready, if ye don't do it mighty quick!" and Jerry reached for his revolver.

"Now, see here, my friend," said the black rider, "if you don't keep cool I'll give you *cause* to feel concern for the safety of your table. I'll make my horse dance the Katydid Quickstep all over it."

"And you'll dance th' mighty-quick dead-step if you don't get down, now I—"

"Hold on! I've got the drop!" the masked man exclaimed, as Jerry was just raising his weapon; and, true enough, a revolver was pointing straight at the proprietor's nose.

Without a word, Jerry wheeled face about and returned to his place behind the bar.

It was clear that his unbidden and unruly guest had the best of the argument.

"Gentlemen," the mysterious mask-wearer then said, addressing the crowd, "although this is not my first visit to your town, it is the first time I have been here in this guise. And I am here on business. What my business is you shall soon learn. Who I am you need not ask, for you shall learn that, too. This is about all I have to say. And now, before I proceed with my business, let me ask all present to drink."

Instantly there was another rush toward the

bar, and Jerry was called upon to set out his wares again, which he did reluctantly, for he had doubts about getting any pay.

While the crowd was drinking, the black rider sat silent and motionless upon his horse.

Rainbow Rob stood leaning against one of the other pool-tables, waiting to see what was coming next, and the Spot Saint, now seated back against the wall, looked as though he considered his "mission" an impossible task.

At length all who wanted to drink had done so, and then the black rider spoke again.

"Gentlemen," he said, at the same time drawing from under his coat a rolled paper, "I will now proceed to explain the object of my visit here to-night. I have here a public notice which I desire to post upon the wall of this saloon, so that it may be seen by all. Mr. Proprietor, where will you have me put it?"

Jerry informed him that he might put it where he pleased.

"Very well; then I will post it right here on the wall," indicating where. "Please stand aside, gentlemen, while I get down."

The crowd fell back, and, obeying a light touch, the black horse sprang from the table to the floor with the agility of a cat.

Riding close to the wall then, the black rider unrolled the paper he held, and proceeded to tack it to the wall with the butt of his revolver.

"Hold on, stranger," some one called out; "you've got it inside out."

True enough, the side of the paper exposed to view was entirely blank.

The mysterious horseman paid no attention to the speaker, but continued his work until the paper was securely placed.

Then, of a sudden, his horse became restless, and began to paw the floor and shy from side to side.

"Look out, citizens!" the black rider called out; "clear the way to the door! Black Satan is getting uneasy!"

"Black Satan!" cried several, in tones of surprise.

"Yes, Black Satan," the rider affirmed; and the horse becoming more quiet just then, the masked man reached up and took hold of the edge of the blank paper he had just pasted up.

"An' you, stranger, who be you?" the same voice demanded.

"I, gentlemen, am— Look out! clear the way there!— I am Sulphur Sam, the proscribed road-agent!"

With a quick motion the self-confessed highwayman tore down the blank paper, revealing a printed poster beneath it, and then, with a wild yell, he spurred his horse to the door and disappeared.

"Ha, ha, ha, ha!" his wild laugh was carried back upon the evening air, and in a few moments more the hoof-strokes of his horse died away in the distance.

Few had followed him to the door, for nearly all eyes were fixed upon the poster he had so adroitly unveiled.

And that poster ran:

"\$1,000 REWARD!"

"ONE THOUSAND DOLLARS REWARD will be paid to the person or persons who will capture and deliver to me the notorious outlaw, 'SULPHUR SAM.'"

"JOHN BARKMORE,

"Sheriff of — County."

"Whew!" whistled Rainbow Rob, "but that was a cool deed!"

"Cool!" cried Jerry Lynch, as he examined his damaged pool-table, "I should say it was! I'm sorry I didn't shoot th' rascal th' minute he put his nose inside th' door, fer I expected somethin' like this th' instant I set eyes onto him. Just look at that table! with th' cloth cut in a dozen places, and fer all I know th' slabs cracked besides! I wouldn't had it damaged fer a hundred dollars! And th' devil's imp that he is didn't even pay fer th' treat he ordered."

"Why didn't ye demand pay in advance?" queried Dan Gilbert.

"Oh! go to thunder!" retorted Jerry. "How could I demand anything, and he with his shootin'-iron in hand?"

"Then what be ye growlin' at?" Jest put it down to profit an' loss, as he told ye to."

"If you're burning for revenge," remarked Rainbow Rob, "you might set to work and capture him and earn the reward."

"By heavens, I'd like to! but it is easier said than done, I'm thinkin'. I'll leave that job for you."

"Thank you, but I am not in search of such work at present. Perhaps our friend, the Spot Saint, here, would like to go for the thousand?"

The Spot Saint shook his head, but remained seated and silent.

"I kin tell ye what it are, feller cits," declared big Dan Gilbert, "if I'd 'a' knowed that feller was Sulphur Sam, you kin bet yer hats he wouldn't 'a' got out o' here so easy. I'd 'a' pulled my weepin' on him an' I'd 'a' said— 'Han's up, old hoss, or ye'll hear somethin' drop!' and you bet I'd 'a' dropped him, too! Oh! I wish he'd come back here fer jest one brief second, jest long enough fer me ter git th' drop on him, an' I reckon I'd corral that thousand dollars. Too bad I didn't know who he

was, an' that I didn't git a crack at him afore he got away."

"Bah!" cried Jerry Lynch, "you're all wind. We know ye. If that man returned, you'd be th' first to git out o' sight. Don't do yer blowin' round here!"

"Would I?" the braying bully—so he was called, by the way—shouted, as he drew his revolver and flourished it about; "would I be th' first ter git out o' sight? I jest wish he'd come, so's I could show ye how I'd run an' hide! You may think ye know Dan Gilbert, but by Satan ye don't! I'm th' long-clawed grizzly of th' woolly West, I am, an' don't ye fergit it! Why, stranger," to Rainbow Rob, "these here citizens hain't never seen me with my war-paint on. I'm a howlin' cyclone when I git started, an' if that feller should poke his snoot inside o' that door at this minute I'd make him a prisoner afore he could wink. Oh!"—with flourishing arms and dilated eyes—"I'm a real—"

At that instant the door opened, and—No, reader, you mistake; you anticipate this time in vain; it was *not* the road-agent, who entered, but a meek and mild-eyed little woman.

Had it been Sulphur Sam, though, the effect upon Dan Gilbert could not have been more marked. At sight of the little woman his face paled, his tongue was stilled, his jaw dropped, his arms fell to his sides, and his whole appearance was that of dismay.

The little woman paused just within the door, looked eagerly around for an instant, and then called:

"Daniel!"

Her voice was high and piercing, and Daniel, the "terrible," fairly quaked.

"DANIEL!" she repeated, in a still higher and louder key, "where are ye? ye needn't think I don't know ye're here, for I *do*. I heerd yer voice afore I kem in. I heerd ye a-blowin', I did, Dan'l, so ye might jest ez well come right out an' show yerself, ye— Oh! *there* ye be, eh?" as she caught sight of her liege lord in the crowd, and she made a dash toward him forthwith.

No need to offer the explanation that this was Dan's wife.

"Now, you Dan'l," she said when she reached him, laying hold upon his arm, "you jest put that 'ere pistol away, an' come right along home. There's no sense in your bein' here a tall. Home is th' place for ye. There'll be a fight jest as like as not, an' it would be jest like ye ter be in th' way an' git hurt. Come, now, come right along home."

"Let go o' me!" exclaimed Dan, roughly, as he tried to shake the woman off.

"No, I *won't* let go! you've got ter go home!"

"Let go, I tell yer!" Dan shouted, then, and he thrust his revolver back into his belt and raised his fist as though to strike.

Instantly a dozen weapons were leveled at him.

"Don't ye do *that*, Dan Gilbert!" he was ordered.

"Son of Anak, repent!" said the Spot Saint, in earnest tones.

A laugh followed this.

"Come on, you fule!" Mrs. Gilbert exclaimed; "can't ye see everybody's a-laffin' at ye? Come on!" pulling at Dan's arm vigorously.

"I *won't* go!" Dan declared doggedly, "an' I tell yer ter let go o' me! D'ye hear?"

"Ye *won't* go, eh?" his better-half insinuated, as with a quick motion she snatched his revolver from his belt; "we'll see! Now, Dan Gilbert, you ped fer home right smart, or I'll make myself a widder!"

The little woman cocked and leveled the weapon as she spoke, and after a glance and a moment's hesitation, Dan concluded that he would go, and started, amid the loud laughter and jeers of the crowd.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SHERIFF'S VERSION.

To most of those present this little "pleasant-ry" of Mrs. Gilbert's was not new. They had seen her display her ascendancy over the "untamed hyena" before.

To the stranger, however, it was a most amusing spectacle.

Mrs. Gilbert, as stated, was a meek and mild-eyed little woman, while her husband was a big, broad-shouldered fellow, almost a giant; she weighing perhaps a hundred and ten pounds, and he not an ounce less than two hundred and twenty.

But, little as she was, she ruled her "lord and master."

It was a standing joke at Silver Nugget that, when the "gospel-dispenser" had made Dan Gilbert and his faithful better-half one, she took it upon herself to be that "one."

And not a little fun did the boon companions of the "braying bully" have at his expense, when they felt so inclined.

On this occasion, however, the pair were no sooner out of sight and hearing than the crowd forgot the diverting episode, and turned their attention again to the placard the daring black rider had so boldly posted.

There it was, staring them in the face—"\$1,000 Reward!" And that reward was offer-

ed for the very man who had entered their presence and put the notice up!

As Rainbow Rob had expressed it, it was certainly a "cool deed." And, "Sulphur Sam" was a cool man.

Let us give him a more finished introduction.

He was a highwayman and outlaw in the true sense. He was an Ishmael. His hand was against every man, and every man's hand was against him. He was one of the most daring "toll-takers" Colorado had ever known. He had first made his appearance in the wild Yampah region, and from there had made his way all over the State, even making so bold as to utter his command of "hands up!" to travelers within sight of Denver, and in broad daylight. He was as merciless, too, as bold, and many a deed of blood was laid to his account.

It is not by any means our intention to make a "hero" of such a character, but such men exist, and if we speak of them at all, we must speak of them as we find them.

The fate of such men is seldom to be envied, and never to be desired. In rare instances, one escapes the penalty of human law and justice; but what honest man would change places with him, to enjoy (?) life in hiding, even with ill-gotten wealth at command?

Who Sulphur Sam was, nobody knew; and no one could be found who had ever seen his face.

Of late he had been "levying" upon the mountain camps of — county, and at last the sheriff had been authorized, following the lead of some of the other counties and several individuals, to offer a reward for his apprehension.

But that that reward should be made public by the outlaw himself, was something unheard of.

"Who is this Sulphur Sam?" asked Rainbow Rob, as the crowd turned attention again to the placard. "Being from down Texas way, I'm not posted."

"He's a danged rascal!" declared the proprietor of the Green Bottle, promptly.

"I haven't the least doubt of that, seeing that your sheriff offers a cool thousand for him."

"Well, that's all we know about him."

"Never saw him before, eh?"

"No, I never did that I know of," Jerry replied, "an' I guess nobody else here ever did."

"I seen him once," announced one man, "but it was at night, an' he wore his black mask. He shot th' driver that night, an' I had ter drive th' hearse on to town."

"Then you must have guessed who it was when he came in."

"Yas, I did; an' I knowed enough ter hold my jaw, too."

"Where does this Sheriff Barkmore live?" the Tulip from Texas next asked, again addressing the proprietor.

"Why, he lives right here in town," Jerry answered.

"Then, citizens, is it not a little strange how this Sulphur Sam got this placard out of his possession, and came here and put it up unmolested?"

"Stranger, ye're right," cried several. "Come, boys, let's go find ther sheriff! Mebbey that cuss has laid him out!"

At once some six or eight men started for the door, but they were checked by another voice exclaiming:

"Say, pardners, here's somethin' writ' at th' bottom o' this heur poster!"

The speaker was one who had advanced to take a closer look at the placard.

"What is it?" was the cry from all.

Rainbow Rob stepped forward close to the wall to learn what the man, who evidently could not read, had found.

Sure enough, there was a line of pencil writing, which ran:

"The sheriff of — county may slit his own ears for a hog. SULPHUR SAM."

"What is it, Tulip? Read it out! Let's hear what it says!" etc., were the cries on every side, and Rob complied and read the words aloud.

Just as he was doing so John Barkmore, the sheriff, rushed into the room, hatless and almost breathless.

"What's that?" he demanded, catching the outlaw's name.

"It's a message fer you," was the general response.

"What is it?" the angry sheriff fairly thundered. "What does it say?"

Rainbow Rob read it again, and Mr. Barkmore swore in language becoming the occasion.

"Has that rascal been here?" he cried.

"Yes, an' he made things lively 'round here fer a time, too."

"The deuce he did! And didn't any of you try to arrest him?"

"We didn't any of us know who he was till he was gone."

"Nobody 'cept me," interposed the man who had acknowledged having seen the black rider before, "an' I had too much regard fer my health ter chip in on his deal."

"You say you knew him?"

"Wal, not jest that, but I'd seen him afore, an' I had an idee who he was."

"And who put that notice up there?" the sheriff demanded.

"Th' cut-throat did it himself!" cried Jerry Lynch. "Be heavens, he came in here on horseback! jumped his horse up upon me best pool-table! treated th' crowd at my expense! an' then he tacked up that notice with the butt of his pistol, an' scooted. On! but he's th' devil's own imp, an' well named, too!"

"And which way did he go?"

"Right down th' street," some one replied. "I was comin' by this way when he dashed out o' here, an' he struck out fer down th' Old Trail."

"By heavens! I'll have him, dead or alive! Citizens, that offer of a reward is genuine, and there's your chance to earn a cool thousand."

"You are Sheriff Blackmore?" queried Rainbow Rob, as he made his way nearer to where the sheriff stood.

"I am, sir," was the short answer; "who are you?"

"My name is Robert Ransom. I'm from Texas. We are a little curious to know how that road-agent got this poster out of your possession and how he had the nerve to come here and put it up."

"Nerve? He's got nerve enough for anything! I had just got the posters from the printer, and was looking at them, seated by my desk near the side-window of my office, intending to set out at once and put them up. Suddenly there came a crash of glass right beside me, and, looking quickly up, I beheld a black revolver, held in a black-gloved hand, pointing straight at me through the broken pane."

"Hands up!" was the order, and of course, under the circumstances I obeyed.

"At first I could see only the revolver and the hand that held it, but after a moment I made out the outline of a black horse and a black rider. Then I beheld a pair of eyes glaring at me through the hole."

"What d'ye want?" I demanded.

"Are you the sheriff of this county?" was asked.

"I am," I answered.

"What are those placards you're looking at?" was the next inquiry.

"Notices of a reward of a thousand dollars for the capture of Sulphur Sam," I explained.

"Well, just put two of them face to face, roll them up, and hand them out here. No false moves, now, or I'll pitch lead right inter you. I am Sulphur Sam, and I'll post one of them up for you." So he ordered.

"There was no help for it, so I rolled the two posters up as directed, and handed them out. Then I was ordered to hold my hands up again."

"Now," said the rascal, "do not move for fifteen minutes, unless you want to die. I have a man posted here, and he has got you covered. Good-night, Mr. Sheriff." And he was gone.

"Well, there I was. I did not believe he had a man there at all, but I did not dare risk moving, so there I had to sit. I could see the clock, and every minute seemed an age. At last, when ten minutes had dragged by, I happened to think of a plan to get out of the fix I was in. That plan was—to blow out the lamp."

"I cursed myself for not thinking of it before. If I could succeed, and thus plunge the room in total darkness, no one without would be able to see me. I drew a long breath, then gave a powerful blow, and out the light went. Then I sprung out of range instantly, but as no shot was fired I concluded that I had not been watched at all."

"Out of the house I rushed, then, hoping to get a shot at the dare-devil before he got out of town, but— Well, here I am, and he is gone."

"Pretty well done!" Rainbow Rob exclaimed.

"You're right," the sheriff had to admit. "I'll square the account with him, though," he added, "and we'll see where the laugh will be when the game ends."

"My opinion, Mr. Sheriff," remarked the Spot Saint, as he arose from his chair, "from what I have seen and heard, is, that the man who sets out to earn the reward you offer will have a big job on hand."

"Hello! who are you?" the sheriff demanded, wheeling around.

"I am Hannibal Long, the Spot Saint from Scarecrow. I—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" the sheriff laughed, "what a name! The 'Scarecrow' would be more to the point, I think."

"What's in a name?" the Saint quoted. "I am satisfied with mine. I, sir, have a mission to perform. I am here to—"

"I thought so," the sheriff interrupted, with another laugh, and then waving the old man to silence, he added:

"Well, good-night, boys. Since the outlaw has published my reward for me, I will not distribute the rest of the posters till to-morrow. Good-night, Mr. Scarecrow; I hope you succeed in performing that mission—whatever it is. Ha, ha, ha!" and with another burst of laughter the sheriff retired.

"Oh, thou scoffer!" the Spot Saint called after him, "repent, repent!"

During the next hour or two the patrons of the Green Bottle were not at loss for themes on which to converse, for the evening had been one

of the most prolific of noteworthy events the saloon had seen for some time.

The hour was late when Rainbow Rob left the saloon to seek the hotel where he had secured a room, and the Spot Saint left soon after. The latter, as he was passing out, turned back for a moment and once more enjoined:

"Repent, oh, sinners! repent, repent!"

CHAPTER V.

THE SILVER CASKET.

THE leading hotel of Silver Nugget was the "Colorado House," owned and managed by one Ivan Oswald, a young man of thirty.

Ivan Oswald was one of the leading men of the town.

He had come to Silver Nugget about four years prior to the time of our story, made his "pile" by some lucky transactions in real estate, most of which fell right in the way of a railroad that was built through the town a year later; and then put up his hotel and settled down as its owner, proprietor and manager.

He was a man of medium height, wore a full, heavy beard, was passably good-looking and always well dressed.

He was not married, but Dame Rumor expressed it as her opinion that he was soon likely to be, judging from the marked attention he was paying to pretty Lulu Lawrence.

This young lady, whom we shall presently introduce, was the belle of the town, and the only child of Judge Barton Lawrence, who owned a valuable gold mine, the "Big Injun," not far from town.

The judge, too, and several other characters, will be introduced at the proper time and place as we proceed.

It was to the Colorado House that Rainbow Rob—as did the Spot Saint, too—made his way on leaving the Green Bottle Saloon.

There each of the strangers had engaged a room, and the hour being late, as stated, they soon retired.

The reader may suspect that these two men, coming to Silver Nugget on the same night and entering the saloon so close together, were known to each other. Such was not the case. They had never met before.

About an hour after they had retired, the house was closed for the night.

At that hour the proprietor was not in, and the night clerk, first making sure that everything was in order and all right, set the night-latch for his employer and went to bed.

It was half an hour later still when Ivan Oswald let himself in, and he proceeded at once to the office, where he sat down.

He was strangely pale, and not a little nervous.

Presently he rose up, stepped out to the bar and took a strong drink of brandy, and then returned to the office and began to pace up and down the floor.

In a few moments the door opened and the night clerk looked in.

"Oh! it is you," he said. "I heard you, and thought I would come down and see who it was. Anything I can do?"

"No, nothing," was the brief answer he got; "good-night."

"Good-night, sir," the clerk responded, and he disappeared again.

For some time Ivan Oswald continued his walking, and then again he threw himself down upon the chair.

"Curse it!" he muttered, "I wish I could see the end of this game. Sometimes I am tempted to give it up and— No, no, I will not give it up. It is too late now to turn back, and the prize is almost within my grasp. No, no; I shall not turn back now."

Again he was silent, and sat with his eyes bent upon the floor.

The room was lighted by a single lamp on the desk, which he had lighted upon entering, and the curtain at the one window of the office was drawn down.

The office was a small room, between the bar-room and main hall, and opened into both.

Presently the proprietor got up once more, and this time he locked both doors and then turned his attention to a safe under the desk.

Taking the lamp from the desk he placed it upon a lower table, where its light fell upon the front of the safe, and then stooping down proceeded to turn the combination dial.

After a moment's work he arose from his task and threw the door of the safe open.

Taking a bunch of keys from his pocket then, he unlocked an inner door and opened a compartment in which he kept his private papers, etc., and to which his clerks were not allowed access.

From this compartment he brought forth a small and strong iron-bound box.

This box he placed on the table near the lamp, swung the doors of the safe shut, and then drew the chair up to the table and sat down, taking the box between his hands.

It was as stated, an iron-bound box, but not iron-bound in the ordinary way, to add to its strength, but to prevent its being opened. The box itself was of hard wood, with its corners bound in brass, and the iron bands had been put

around it and riveted with hot rivets. Nothing short of a sharp file would ever remove them.

The keyhole of the box was sealed with wax, in which was stamped—

"A.D. 1820."

And upon the top of the box were carved these words:

"Woe be unto him who shall open this box before the Second day of October, in the year of our Lord One Thousand Eight Hundred and Eighty."

"FRANKLIN HOWARD."

For a long time Ivan Oswald stared at this warning inscription in silence.

At last he muttered:

"Five years this box has now been in my possession, and I, coward that I am, have never dared to learn the secret it contains. I shall hesitate no longer. For sixty long years it has been closed, according to the date it bears, but it shall remain closed no longer. The nearer the second of October draws, the more impatient I am to learn what the box contains. No, I will not put it off another hour!"

He had evidently made up his mind previously, for from his coat pocket he now took a paper containing several of the best files he had been able to procure.

Selecting one of these, he fitted it to a handle, and then set to work upon one of the iron bands, to cut it off.

At the end of half an hour's almost constant work, he laid the file down and wiped the perspiration from his face.

One of the bands was severed.

Two more remained.

"Curse the thing!" he muttered, as he threw down the worn file and selected a fresh one, "I will open it now or die. I have been a fool to hesitate so long, and all owing to this inscription on the lid. What ill can come to me? Bah! it is utter nonsense!" And turning the box around, he began to file away at another of the bands.

Presently he stopped to rest.

"It is a strange affair—an almost weird affair," he muttered. "It is like a romance. To think that the silver casket which this box is said to contain has been locked and sealed for a hundred years! It is almost incredible. Yet it is undoubtedly true. And what does that silver casket hold? What is the secret? By heavens! I will know within an hour!"

Again he set to work with his file.

In due time another band was severed, and only one more remained.

"Sixty years bound," the young man half-exclaimed, as with feverish haste he inserted another fresh file, "but it shall be opened at last!"

With eager haste he set to work again, his hands trembling and the perspiration dropping from his face.

The work was beginning to tell upon him, and now his resting spells came more frequently.

"My respected ancestor," he communed, half-facetiously, during one of these periods, "had you any idea when you sealed this box up so almost hermetically that I, your unworthy descendant, would have the nerve to disobey your warning and open it before the proper time? It seems to me you had a mean suspicion of your family, or you would not have made these iron bands so infernal thick and hard. Well, here goes to finish the third one, and thank Heaven it is the last!"

Again wiping the perspiration from his face, he took up the file and resumed work upon the third and last band.

He worked faithfully, too, and in due time the third band was severed.

"There!" he muttered, "done at last! and now for the secret."

With impatient haste, his heart beating fast and his hands trembling, he took hold of the severed bands of iron and bent them back and removed them, and then he picked the wax seal from over the keyhole.

This done, he next tried all the small keys he had, but none of them would fit the lock.

Determined not to be balked now, he took up the largest of the files and forced its sharp end under the lid, and in a few moments the lid was wrenched from its place and the silver casket was exposed to view.

And then did Ivan Oswald stagger back with paling face.

There upon the lid of the silver casket, in letters bold and black, was the following:

"THOU TRAITOR!"

"False to thy trust, thou hast dared to open the box. Here stop. Attempt to open the silver casket at thy peril."

Startling words, and little wonder the young man drew back and for a moment hesitated to disregard them.

After a moment, though, his courage returned.

He had gone too far now to allow any idle or superstitious fears to turn him from his object.

While he hesitated his eye caught sight of a folded paper lying in the box beside the casket, and drawing it out he read:

"I, Franklin Howard, before turning the silver casket over to the care of my son, have resolved to inclose it in this box to enhance its safety in the years to come. If it remains unopened until the proper time, those who open it then will readily un-

derstand the object and significance of the warning words upon its lid. And I sincerely hope my descendants may prove to be men honorable enough to keep the trust as sacredly as I, and my father before me, have kept it."

Ivan Oswald smiled as he read.

"Simple-hearted old man," he remarked, "his precautions were of no avail. Of course the object and significance of the warning words are apparent. They are words intended to frighten any one who might venture to pry into the secret. Ha, ha, ha! a good idea, my respected ancestor, but your words have no further influence over me. Now for the secret."

Taking the casket out of the box, the young man examined it. It was of solid silver, about six inches square by four inches high, and had an oval-shaped lid. On the top of the lid was a handle, and attached to the handle by a piece of fine wire was a small key. The keyhole of the casket, like that of the outer box, was sealed over with wax, and like the seal of the box, too, the seal of the casket bore a date. It was this:

"OCTOBER 2, 1780."

For nearly one hundred years the silver casket had not been opened.

For a long time Ivan Oswald hesitated again, but at last, with a final resolve, he picked up one of the files to break the seal and detach the key.

Before he could do so, a most remarkable thing happened.

A tall figure in white rose up before him, a skeleton hand was pointed at him, and a hollow voice said:

"Open not the silver casket!"

With a gasp of terror the young man sprang up, staggered back a step, and fell fainting to the floor.

When he came to, the silver casket was gone.

CHAPTER VI.

MYSTERIOUS MANDATES.

WHEN Rainbow Rob awoke next morning it was broad daylight, the sun was streaming in at his window, and the busy little town was all astir.

"Hello!" he exclaimed, as he sprang out of bed; "I'd better be getting up, or I shall be late for breakfast."

He proceeded to dress at once, and while he was doing so the morning gong was sounded.

"This is a pretty decent hotel," the Tulip mused. "They're bound to give a fellow his money's worth of rest, it seems."

He was about ready to leave his room when his eyes fell upon a large envelope, which had evidently been thrust in under the door during the night.

He picked it up, and much to his surprise found that it was addressed to himself.

"ROBERT RANSOM, ESQ."

That was the simple superscription it bore.

Considerably puzzled, Rainbow Rob turned back into the room and tore the envelope open.

It contained a small sheet of heavy paper, on which was the following:

"1780. THOU ART ONE. 1880.

"ROBERT RANSOM, thou art one of the present eight living descendants of MR. BARTON LAWRENCE, who died October 2, 1780. Thou art hereby summoned to be present at the Colorado House, in the town of Silver Nugget, on Saturday, October 2, 1880, at ten o'clock in the forenoon, bringing proof of thy identity."

"Remember the Silver Casket."

"Whew!" the Tulip whistled; "here is a startler. Some one in this town knows who I am, that is certain, and there must be something in that old silver casket story, after all. I never took any stock in the story, but now I guess I had better hunt up those old papers my father used to guard so carefully, and see what this secret is."

Putting the paper back into the envelope, and thrusting the latter into his pocket, he left his room and went down-stairs.

Breakfast was ready, and he repaired at once to the dining-room.

He had nearly done eating when the waiter entered with a telegram, and inquired aloud:

"Mr. Robert Ransom?"

"I am he," Rob responded, promptly.

The waiter advanced and gave the telegram into his hand.

Tearing open the envelope at once, he read the message, and then finished his breakfast in haste and left the room.

Going to the office he paid his bill, sent a servant up to his room for his gripsack, and as soon as it was brought he started for the railroad station.

Silver Nugget—have we mentioned it?—was a railroad town, and the station was on the northern side of the town. Just beyond the railroad was a canyon—"Dismal Canyon" it was called, and beyond that were rocks and trees in all their pristine wildness, save here and there where a cabin was to be seen. The railroad crossed the canyon about half a mile below the station, ran westward through the northern outskirts of the town, and then on in a southwesterly direction.

The main street of the town bore the name of the "Old Trail," and on it, at the point where it crossed the railroad, the station was situated.

The Old Trail, too, crossed Dismal Canyon, a wooden bridge spanning the canyon at its narrowest part, and led away to the north, while in the opposite direction it stretched out into the hills to the south.

When Rainbow Rob arrived at the station, he stepped at once to the window of the telegraph office and inquired:

"Was this telegram received here?" showing the telegram he had got.

"It was, sir," was the reply of the operator.

"I desire to send an answer. Please give me a blank."

"Step just within the door, sir, and you will find blanks, pen and ink, right at your hand."

As he spoke the operator threw open the door of his little office, and Rob stepped in.

There was a little desk against the wall just inside the door, and the articles the operator had named were all there.

Rainbow Rob took up the pen and began to write the telegram he desired to send in answer to the one he had received, but he had not written far when he stopped short and appeared to be trying to recollect something.

For a moment he stood idle, and then laying down the pen he drew some papers from his pocket and selected one he desired to consult, laying the others down upon the desk beside him.

Among them, and lying on top, was the large envelope containing the mysterious note we have seen.

Finding what he wanted, he finished his writing, and then delivered the message to the operator for transmission.

"How much?" Rob asked.

The operator named the charge, received the money, and was about to turn away when his eyes caught the big envelope with the name it bore.

He paused and looked more closely, and Rainbow Rob looked at him.

The operator laid down the telegram and money, opened a drawer near at hand, and from it took an envelope exactly like the one Rob had found in his room.

"These two envelopes are very much alike," he remarked.

"Yes, they are," Bob agreed.

"And so is the writing upon them."

"It is certainly the same hand."

This was true, and the name on the envelope in the operator's possession was this:

"ALVIN HOWE, ESQ."

"There is something remarkable about this," the operator declared.

"Is this envelope addressed to you?"

"Yes; that is my name."

"May I inquire how the letter came to you?"

"I found it here under my office door this morning."

"Indeed! And I found this one under the door of my room at the hotel when I got up."

For a moment both looked at each other and at the mysterious envelopes in silence.

Alvin Howe, the agent and operator, was a young man, twenty-five or twenty-six years of age. He was tall and dark, rather good-looking, and well built. His hair and eyes were black, and he sported a mustache of the same color.

"It is possible," said Rainbow Rob, presently, he being the first to speak, "that both of these envelopes contain a similar notice."

"It is very likely that they do," the operator agreed.

"Does yours say anything about a silver casket?"

"It does. It— Here, though, read it for yourself."

As he spoke the operator drew a small sheet of heavy paper from the envelope and handed it to Rob.

Rob took and read it.

It was exactly like the note he had received in every particular, except, of course, the name of the person addressed.

"Is it like the note your envelope contains?" the operator asked.

"It is, in every respect," Rob replied, and he handed his to Howe to read.

"Yes," the latter agreed, "they are both alike. I— Perhaps you desire your message sent at once, though."

"Well, yes, as soon as you can, please. We will speak of this matter afterward. By the way, though, how soon can I get a train for Denver?"

"One will leave here in about ten minutes."

"All right; send the telegram, and then we shall have some minutes to spare."

The operator seated himself at his instruments, and for a few minutes was busily engaged.

When he was done he returned to the desk, where Rainbow Rob was standing.

"You do your telegraphing in cipher," he remarked, "and I had to send the message slow."

"About these mysterious notices," said Rob, passing over the operator's remark with a mere nod, "have you ever heard of this silver casket before?"

"Never," the operator answered. "Have you?"

"Yes. I remember my father used to speak about it frequently, and he often expressed the wish that he might live to see the mystery out. He died several years ago, however. He had some old papers connected with the affair, which he used to guard jealously, and at his death he delivered them to me, telling me to preserve them. I must get them and learn what I can from them."

"My parents died when I was but a child," said Howe, "and none of their possessions ever came to me. If there were any such papers in my branch of the family, they are lost now, and I never saw them."

"One thing seems plain," pursued Rob, "and that is, that we are related to each other."

"Yes, that is true."

"And another fact self-evident is, that there is some person watching over the eight living descendants of Mr. Barton Lawrence."

"True again."

"And of those eight we are two. Who are the other six?"

"Ah, the mystery is too deep for me. I give it up."

"It seems to me," Rainbow Rob went on, "that I heard mention last night of a Judge Barton Lawrence. Is there such a person hereabouts?"

"By heavens! I thought that 'Barton Lawrence' had a familiar sound. Yes, there is such a man here. He is Judge Lawrence, mayor of the town and owner of the 'Big Injun' Mine. Can it be that he has a hand in the game?"

"It is impossible to tell," Rob answered, "but if I make his acquaintance when I return from Denver, I certainly shall ask him."

"And, what is this 'silver casket'? What is its secret? Where is it kept?"

"Your questions floor me. No doubt, though, the person who wrote and delivered these notices to us has it in keeping."

"Have you any suspicion what the secret is?"

"At present I have not. The silver casket, though, I believe, was locked and sealed on the day of Barton Lawrence's death, and was not to be opened until just one hundred years later."

"Great Scott! that is a secret with a vengeance."

"It is indeed, and— Hello! here comes the train. I expect to return here this afternoon, and will see you again."

"All right! Shall be glad to see you."

The agent was busy selling tickets, etc., even while he was talking, and now that the train was approaching, he had to give his whole attention to his duties.

Rainbow Rob left the office at once, and in a few moments more was aboard the train and speeding toward Denver.

After a time he thought again of the mysterious notice he had received, and put his hand to his pocket to draw out the envelope, when to his surprise he found *two* envelopes instead of one, not only his own, but also the one addressed to Alvin Howe.

CHAPTER VII.

MISS TRYPHENA MARKS.

THE Spot Saint from Scarecrow, when applying for a room at the Colorado House, had found his appearance decidedly against him.

At first he was flatly refused.

On second look, however, the clerk found that ragged as the old man certainly was, he had every appearance of cleanliness, and finally gave him a cheap room on the top floor.

When the Spot Saint arose next morning he dressed and washed, first mending his ragged coat a little here and there, and then with his old-fashioned carpet-bag in hand he went down to breakfast.

This carpet-bag was the only baggage he had, and it did not appear to contain much.

After engaging his room on the previous night, he had left this carpet-bag with the clerk while he went out for a little while.

"Take good care of it, my dear friend," he had enjoined, "it contains tracts."

On this morning, though, he did not trouble the clerk again, but actually carried the bag with him into the dining-room and placed it between his feet while he ate his breakfast.

After breakfast he set out to begin the good work he had undertaken.

Here, he reasoned, was a town of certainly not less than five thousand inhabitants, and in order to do his work thoroughly and accomplish what he desired, he must, or ought to, visit every house.

This he resolved to do.

He began at the extreme eastern side of the town and set out to work toward the western side, making a call at every house.

Calling at a house, his first question was as to who lived there. Being told, he gave out a tract or two, urged the people to repent, and then passed on to the next.

Finally, in the course of the forenoon, he called at the humble residence of one Tryphena Marks.

Miss Tryphena Marks was a maiden lady

aged forty or thereabouts, and was just six feet and two inches in height, and proportioned accordingly. She lived alone, and supported herself by keeping a small shop where she sold various small articles of various kinds, and also patent medicines.

She was not bad-looking at all, but in size she was perfectly Amazonian.

Miss Marks was, as stated, a single lady, but that was no fault of hers. It was well known that she was willing, even anxious to marry, but she could find no one to accept her.

Her size was the great stumbling-block in her way to matrimonial happiness. No man could she find who was willing to take upon himself so great a responsibility.

Many and many a time had Tryphena endeavored to catch a husband. She had had many "nibbles" at her hook, and had had some fair bites; but so far she had never been able to land a single specimen.

At first she had been decidedly particular and fastidious in her choice. A few years later she was not so hard to please. And now, at the time of our story, her only conditions were that the favored one must be of her own color, and honest. What she wanted was—a man.

Upon this lady, as stated, the Spot Saint called.

Keeping a little shop, as she did, she had no chance to refuse him admittance, if she had desired to do so at first sight, for he was in her little shop and seated before she was hardly aware of his presence.

He had been seated but a moment when she strode into the shop from a room at one side.

"What do you want, sir?" she demanded, business-like.

"Madam," answered the Spot Saint, as he looked up, "may I inquire who lives here?"

"I do," was the brief reply. "What do you want?"

The Spot Saint opened his carpet-bag and took out a few tracts, at the same time continuing:

"And may I ask your name?"

"What do you want to know my name for?" the woman demanded.

"Believe me," returned the Saint, "I do not ask out of idle curiosity. I have a mission to perform. I—"

"What is your name?"

"My name, madam, is Hannibal Long."

"Well, mine is Tryphena Marks. Now state your bus—"

At the mention of the name "Marks," the Saint had glanced up quickly and evidently with interest, and the glance he gave the woman from his keen little eyes caused her to stop short in what she was saying and stare at him.

"Marks?" repeated the Saint; "surely that name is most familiar. I once had a friend named Marks, and I must say that your features resemble his to a certain degree. But, I—"

"Who was the Marks you knew?" the "little maid" inquired.

"His name was John Marks."

"Why, that was my poor father's name. Can it be—"

"It surely must be," cried the Saint. "But we can prove it. Was your grandfather's name Elijah Marks?"

"Yes, that was his name, sir."

"Then you are indeed the child of my old friend, John Marks," cried the Saint, springing up. "Will you allow me to shake your hand? Bless me! how you have grown! I—"

"Sir! were you *twice* my dead father's friend I would not allow you to ridicule my misfortune! I—"

"My dear madam," cried the Spot Saint, contritely, "pardon me. If I have said aught to hurt your feelings, I am very sorry. What the misfortune to which you allude is, I cannot imagine."

"I cannot believe you, sir. Surely you can see that I am abnormally large, that I am a perfect *monstrosity*."

"I see nothing of the kind!" the Saint cried. "You are tall, it is true, but you are so well proportioned that it is scarcely noticeable. On the contrary, your appearance is queenly, your presence is majestic. I— No, no, I do not flatter; I mean what I say. Your ideas about your appearance are all wrong."

Tryphena Marks had never been so complimented in all her life. A warm flush mounted to her cheeks, and she dropped gracefully upon a chair and invited the Saint to sit down again.

"Then you really mean it?" she inquired.

"I do, madam, I do."

"But, your business? What was the object of your call?"

"Ah!" the Saint ejaculated, "you call me back to my life work. I have a mission to perform. I have come to save sinners. I am making a call at each house to leave a few tracts. May I leave one or two with you? Not that I wish to insinuate that you need them, madam, but none of us are perfect, and to read them will do you no harm."

"I will take them, certainly, and the more willingly since you are a friend of my poor father's."

"Ah! yes, your father; he was a fine man. And he is dead, eh?"

"Yes."

"When did he die?"
 "About ten years ago."
 "Too bad. John was a fine man. And your grandfather died—let me see, was it in 'Forty-five?"
 "Yes, that was the year."
 "You do not remember him, of course."
 "No, but I have often heard him spoken of, and have a likeness of him."
 "No, there can be no mistake. You are certainly the daughter of my old friend John. And your mother?"
 "She is dead."
 "And your sisters—brothers—have you any?"
 "No, I have none."
 "Surely, though, you have some relatives living?"
 "Not to my knowledge."
 "Indeed?"
 "I may have some, but I do not know that I have. I certainly have no near relatives."
 "No doubt you could find a host of them, if you had a fortune to bequeath."
 "Very likely I could find some."
 "I suppose you are little interested in the matter, however."
 "Very little, indeed, sir."
 "Few people are, though I have known some who kept a family record extending as far up the family tree as they could trace. Nor is it a bad idea, for who can tell what may come of such a record as a proof of identity?"
 "My mother was one of that sort, sir."
 "Was she?"
 "Yes. She had an accurate record that dated back many years."
 "Indeed!"
 "Yes, and I have the record now. It is quite a curiosity."
 "How far back does it date?"
 "It must be nearly a hundred years now."
 "Then it certainly must be a curiosity. If I were you I should guard it carefully. Such a record once lost can never be replaced."
 "Oh! I fully intend to do so, sir. In fact, when my mother was dying she urged me to promise to keep the record on as she had kept it, and I promised."
 "Perhaps she had some object in making that request."
 "I believe she had."
 "Why so?"
 "Because she started to tell me something, some secret I have always believed, but her strength failed her before she could tell me what she wanted to, and she died."
 "All the more reason then, I think, why you should preserve the record."
 "So I think, sir."
 "You have never married, I believe?"
 "N—no, sir, I have never married."
 The Spot Saint addressed Miss Marks in a fatherly way, though he was certainly not old enough to be her father, and his deep voice and honest manner won her confidence.
 He now smiled.
 "Your tone of reply," he remarked, "leads me to guess that you may be married ere long. Have I guessed aright?"
 It was a tender question—to Tryphena it was a vital question, almost.
 "I—I cannot say that you have," she replied.
 "I am not engaged, though I—"
 She stopped.
 "Ah! I see, I see," the Spot Saint exclaimed, with a laugh, "young ladies are the same the world over, now and forever. You are in love. Ha, ha, ha! I can see it. But, do not think I laugh at that; I laugh because you cannot hide the secret. Young ladies are the same forever."
 Tryphena blushed like a rose.
 "You certainly do not call me young, do you?" she demanded, playfully.
 "Why not?" queried the Saint. "You are certainly not so very, very old, and you do not look a day over twenty-eight."
 "Oh! you old flatterer! I have a mind to order you out of my store!" still playfully.
 "Pray do not," the old man requested, "for I am going now, at once. I trust I have given no offense," still smiling.
 "None whatever," was the reply.
 A few words more were exchanged, and then the Spot Saint took his departure, the lady inviting him to call again, which he promised to do.
 "Poor old man!" Tryphena thought, as she watched him walk away, "he must be very poor. Since he was my father's friend, however, he is welcome to my home."
 And the Saint, as he paused at the next house or two to leave his tracts, no longer inquired who lived there, but seemed to take less interest in his "mission." Was he more than he seemed? Had he found some one for whom he had been in search? Be that as it may, he never carried out his first idea of calling personally at every house in the town.

CHAPTER VIII.

A BACKWARD LONER.

MISS TRYPHENA MARKS was indeed in love, and the object of her affections was one Eleazer Brown.

Mr. Eleazer Brown was a gentleman about Tryphena's own age, but not by any means her equal in size. He stood but four feet nine in his boots.

And the love the maiden had for him was genuine and sincere. It was more. It was determined. She had made up her mind that Eleazer Brown should be hers.

Eleazer, on the other hand, was equally determined that he would not be.

The first time Eleazer saw Tryphena he did not see all of her. He saw only her face.

As we have said, she was not by any means bad-looking.

Eleazer happened to be passing her shop one day, when she was seated in a low chair near the window, and he saw her. He smiled, and Tryphena allowed herself to smile in return.

At this time Mr. Brown had not been long in town, and had heard little or nothing about Tryphena and her desire to find a husband.

Every day after that, the day of their first exchange of smiles, Eleazer passed through that street on his way to and from the mine where he was employed, the "Big Injun," and every day Tryphena was seated at the window to receive his smile.

After a time some of the "boys" at the mine "caught onto" Eleazer's little game, and they resolved to help him on in every possible way.

One day at noon when they were all seated around the big crusher, eating their dinners, the conversation was purposely turned upon the subject of the wealth of feminine beauty of which the town could boast.

"I tell ye what it am, boyees," said one old fellow, who was taking a hand in the game of urging Eleazer on to make a conquest, "there hain't no purtier gal in this heur town nor Jedge Lawrence's little darter."

"Where's Claudia Madison, th' darter of th' old postmaster?" demanded another. "She's most as purty as Miss Lawrence, I allow."

"Yas, she's a right purty girl," admitted the first speaker, "but not quite so purty as Miss Lulu. She's a daisy fur looks."

Several other girls and women of the place were mentioned and passed upon, and then another of the group put in:

"Talkin' about yer good-lookers, whar's the leetle gal that keeps th' store down Canyon street?"

When this came out, covert glances were cast at Eleazer.

His face flushed a little, and he waited eagerly to hear the verdict.

"Wal," said the old first speaker, "she's a mighty fine-lookin' gal, I allow. I don't know but she's 'most as well heeled fer looks as th' leetle post-office beauty."

"She ain't slow, fer a fact," some one else chimed in. "She wasn't out o' sight when beauty was handed 'round, you bet!"

"You're right she wasn't," some one else added. "In fact, I'll bet she wasn't a great many seats back from th' front row."

"Ever seen her, pardner?" asked the man who sat nearest to Eleazer.

"Y—yes," Eleazer faltered, "I—I believe I have."

"What's your opine?"

"Why, I think she's a purty good-looker, an' no mistake."

"It's a wonder ter me," the old first speaker declared, "that some o' you young bucks don't shine up an' marry her. There she lives, all alone, an' she'd make jest ez fine a little wife as kin be found."

The word "little," it will be seen, was frequently used.

"How's a feller ter git at her, though?" queried one young man who had been in Eleazer's place once, and knew where the best stroke was to be laid.

"That's a purty question fer a young feller like you ter ask," cried the old man in a tone of disgust. "Hain't ye got no sand?"

Why, if I was one of ye I'll tell ye how I'd do it. I'd manage to pass by that way once in a while, till I'd catch her eye, an' then I'd sling her a smile. Then if she smiled back, I'd keep it up fer awhile, goin' by every day. Then arter a time I'd spruce up some fine evenin', an' step inter her shop an' buy some leetle notion, an' at th' same time try ter git inter her good graces by openin' a leetle conversation. Might mention th' weather, ter lead off with, then foller up with yer king an' queen, so ter say, holdin' th' bowers back as a sort o' s'prise-party, an'—"

"Hold on, old man," some one interrupted; "this isn't a game o' keards we're talkin' about."

"I know it ain't, pards; but I was a-talkin' figgerative. If a feller has hoss sense, he'll drop in on th' gal with a handful o' trumps, an' he'll make sure o' th' game—if he kin! See?"

Many a sly glance was directed at the unsuspecting Eleazer while this conversation was going on, and all saw that he was taking it all in eagerly.

A great many things were said in Miss Marks's favor, and at last Eleazer felt that the one thing necessary to make his happiness in life complete was to win Tryphena Marks for his wife.

He resolved to do it.

That evening when he went home from work, he glanced in at the window of the little shop, as usual, and there the face of his fair one beamed upon him.

This time he went a little further in the matter and lifted his hat.

Tryphena bowed, and the lover's happiness was almost complete.

After supper that evening Eleazer put on his best attire, blacked his boots, went to a barber he sometimes patronized and had his hair oiled and combed, and then called around to see the object of his heart's desire.

Entering the shop half-timidly, he looked around to see Tryphena's smiling face. But she was not there.

In a moment, though, she entered from the adjoining room.

Eleazer looked up at her in profound surprise. Could this be she—the little maid of whom he had heard so much praise, and whose pretty face he had seen so often at the window as he passed? He could not believe it. No, assuredly not; this was an older face than hers; it must be her mother.

Tryphena, though, recognized her lover at once, and smiled her sweetest.

That smile did not look as it had looked through the window.

"Is—is your darter in, ma'm?" the bashful lover asked.

"My daughter!" the fair maid exclaimed, "I have no daughter, sir."

"I—I mean th' young lady who—who bows to me sometimes when I pass."

"Why, that's me!"

"You?"

"Yes."

"But, I—I thought you were little. I didn't know you was a six-footer. Th' boys all said you was a little gal."

"The boys, eh? Their idle tongues are always running. It is true that I am a little tall, Mr. Brown—that is your name, I believe; but I cannot help that. Will you not step into my sitting-room and sit down?"

"No—no, I—I guess not," Eleazer stammered, "I won't have time. I jest kem in to buy a—a—"

"To buy what?"

"A—a box of pills, I guess; or was it a paper-collar?"

"Eleazer Brown, that ain't no such a thing!" Tryphena exclaimed. "You came here a-purpose to see me. Now don't try to back out and say you didn't, for I know you did. You've been flirting with me for some time, and I've encouraged you, too, because—because I like you; and at last you've come in to make my acquaintance. Now, I know that you are a little short, Mr. Brown, and that I am a little tall, but you need not let that trouble you. I suppose you think that I would scorn you on that account, but that is not so. I am not so sensitive. So pray give yourself no uneasiness on my account. Wait, Mr. Brown, wait; do not be in such a haste;" (Eleazer was backing toward the door); "I hope you will come in for a little while. I have so few visitors, and—"

"N—no," Eleazer interrupted, "I think I'll go. I only stepped in ter buy a—a paper o' pins."

"Now you're telling just what isn't so, and you know you are. I know you like me, Eleazer, because I've seen it in your face. The only trouble is, you're so sensitive because you're a little shorter than I am. I don't see why you need be, I'm sure; I don't mind it in the least. Now won't you come in for a little while? I am—"

"N—no, I can't: I'm in an awful hurry; I only wanted to buy a sheet o' paper, and—"

"Very well, then, but remember this: you began to flirt first, and I'm not the woman to have my affections trifled with. If you are too timid to make love, I'll do it. This is leap-year, and—"

But Eleazer Brown was gone.

Next evening at the post-office he got a letter from Tryphena.

It was a regular old-time, musk-scented, genuine orthodox love-letter. It was pasted all over with little forget-me-nots, was full of endearing words, and was fairly bubbling over with gushes of love. And it ended thus:

"The rose is red, the violet blue;

Love is sweet and so are you.

"TRYPHENA MARKS."

Now Eleazer Brown was of marriageable age, being forty at least, and there was no reason why he should not marry if he wanted to. He was an honest, simple hearted, hard-working man, and had Tryphena Marks been nearer his own size, there is no doubt that he would have been only too anxious to marry her. But as it was, she standing six feet two and he but four feet nine, he stood appalled.

The more Tryphena tried to draw him to her, the more he drew away.

He seemed to live in actual fear of her. Had she menaced his liberty—well, perhaps she did have some designs against that—no doubt she had;—but had she been seeking his very life, he could not have been more careful to keep out of her way.

And the more he kept out of her sight the more persistent she was in following him up, until now, at the time of our story, the case was growing decidedly interesting.

Poor Eleazer was the object of much fun for the boys at the mine, and often he was the object of some practical joke in which the name of Tryphena was used.

On the day of which our last preceding chapter treats, the superintendent of the mine sent Eleazer on a fictitious errand down to Canyon street, where he needs must pass Tryphena's shop. And barely had the Spot Saint passed out of sight when Eleazer appeared, skulking along on the opposite side of the street.

Tryphena soon sighted him, and in a moment she was at the door, exclaiming:

"Mr. Brown! Mr. Brown! won't you please step over here a minute?"

Eleazer heard, but he heeded not. Tryphena called again, and then started across the street. Eleazer saw her, and with a gasp of "Oh Lord!" took to his heels and ran.

CHAPTER IX.

SOME OLD DOCUMENTS.

Most of the principal characters of our romance have now been introduced.

There are, however, some others whose personal acquaintance we must make.

One of these was Judge Barton Lawrence.

He was a gentleman about forty years of age, and owned, as previously stated, a valuable gold mine a short distance from town.

The "Big Injun," as the mine was called, had been the means of giving the town its start, and it was still paying big returns for the working.

The judge was rich, and was one of the leading citizens of the county.

His house was one of the finest the town could boast of, and was situated on one of the prettiest streets. It was presided over by the judge's pretty and accomplished daughter, Miss Lulu, who was his only child.

On this morning we find Judge Lawrence pacing to and fro in his library, an open letter in his hand, while on the floor lies a large envelope from which the letter has just been taken.

The letter itself consisted of a small sheet of heavy paper, on which was the following:

"1780. THOU ART ONE. 1880."

"BARTON LAWRENCE, thou art one of the present eight living descendants of Mr. BARTON LAWRENCE, who died October 2, 1780. Thou art hereby summoned to be present at the Colorado House, in the town of Silver Nugget, on Saturday, October 2, 1880, at ten o'clock in the forenoon, bringing proof of thy identity."

"Remember the Silver Casket."

After pacing up and down the room for some time, Judge Lawrence read the mysterious note again.

To him it was a mystery.

The letter had just been handed to him by a servant, who reported that she had found it when it had been slipped in under the front door during the night.

Presently there came a knock at the door, and a caller was announced.

This proved to be the postmaster of the town, one Henry Madison.

"Good-morning Henry," the judge greeted him, "how do you do?"

"Good-morning, judge," the postmaster returned, adding: "I am fairly well, I thank you; how are you?"

"Quite well. This is an early visit from you. Anything I can do for you?"

"Yes, I am around rather early, but I could not put it off. I want to ask you what you think of this."

As he spoke, Henry Madison drew from his pocket a large envelope precisely like the one that lay on the floor, and like the ones we have seen Rainbow Rob and Alvin Howe received.

"Why," the judge exclaimed, "I have just received an envelope like that; can it be that the contents of the two are the same?"

"You shall soon know," Mr. Madison replied, and from his envelope he drew a small sheet similar to the one the judge held in his hand.

The two were exactly alike, except in the matter of the name to whom addressed.

"It is the very same!" the judge cried, as he read it. "Where did you get it?"

"I found it in the post-box this morning."

"Indeed!"

"Yes. And where did you get yours?"

"It was put in under the front door during the night."

"Strange, very."

"It certainly is a strange affair. But, why do you come to me about it?"

"Can't you see?"

"Because the name mentioned in it is my name—or like it?"

"Exactly."

"Well, and what do you want me to do?"

"I want you to do nothing. I have come to talk with you about the case. That is all. What do you know about this affair of the silver casket?"

"Do you know anything about it?"

"A little, yes."

"Then perhaps we both possess the information. Come, sit down, and we will talk it over."

The two sat down and Judge Lawrence resumed:

"When my father died, in 1850, he gave me some old papers, telling me to preserve them carefully and to add to them whatever was necessary to complete the record of the family. And his last words were, 'Some day they may be of value to you, for you may live to be present at the opening of the silver casket.'"

"Mystery of mysteries!" exclaimed the old postmaster. "My father's dying request was so nearly the same that your story will answer for mine."

"Indeed! and you have some old family records too?"

"I have."

"How far back do they date?"

"To the year 1780?"

"And they refer to—"

"To one Barton Lawrence."

"Then you and I must be related to each other, James."

"So it would seem."

"Have you those old papers with you?"

"I have."

"Good! we will compare them with the papers I have."

Judge Lawrence rose and went to a small safe in one corner of the room, and from it took a packet of papers.

These he brought and laid upon the table, inviting the old postmaster to draw up his chair.

"Here," the judge said, taking up a parchment letter, "is a letter in the handwriting of the original Barton Lawrence. It is dated at New York, September 15, 1780."

"I believe I have a copy of it," the old postmaster remarked, looking his own papers over. "Yes, here it is."

"Is it possible? Well, follow me, and I will read this one aloud. It runs as follows:

"NEW YORK, Sept. 15, 1780.

"TO MY CHILDREN:—

"I, your father, believing that I am nearing my end, have made my last and final will. What you will receive, between you, is only one quarter of all I possess. Had you, Barton, been as upright and noble as your sister, I would have divided my whole fortune between you equally; but as it is, the good must suffer for the wrong-doing of the evil. But, the sum I leave to each of you is a fortune in itself. The remainder of my wealth I shall leave to your posterity, to be divided equally among them all, on the one hundredth anniversary of the day of my death."

"The secret of this wealth is inclosed in a silver casket, which is in the keeping of one who will guard it with his life, and who, during his lifetime, will keep trace of your children. At his death, his son, if living, will take upon himself the trust and task. If the son is not living, then he to whom I have given the silver casket in keeping will choose some other person whom he can trust. And this trust will be handed down from father to son."

"It will be useless for you, my children, to strive to gain possession of this silver casket. Therefore, try not to obtain it for yourselves, but keep, each of you, a record of your family that may be handed down from generation to generation, in every branch, so that when the one hundredth anniversary of the day of my death shall come, each heir may have no trouble in proving him—or herself—my direct descendant."

"To you, my children, and to you my grandchildren, and to you my great-grandchildren, do I extend this request. And you, my great-great-grandchildren, whoever you may be, will, if your forefathers carry out my directions, reap the benefits of my bequest to you. To you I say: Put your hopes in the secret of the silver casket. You, and mayhap your fathers, on the one hundredth anniversary of the day of my death, shall see the silver casket opened; for be ye mindful that he who holds it in keeping, keeps also a record of my descendants, and not one shall be overlooked. And it shall be my prayer to Providence so to order your destinies that when the day arrives you shall all be found in one country, and near to one another."

"BARTON LAWRENCE."

While the judge was reading, the old postmaster followed him as directed.

"My paper is the same," he declared. "It is a correct copy."

"Which is proof that we are both descendants of old Barton Lawrence, the original."

"Yes, that is plain."

"And do your papers show from which branch of the family you come?"

"They do."

"And which do you claim?"

"I trace my ancestry back to Ann Lawrence, the daughter of old Barton, who in 1781, married one Henry Madison. 'You, of course, are descended from the scapegrace son.'"

"Yes; he was my grandfather."

"Your grandfather?"

"Yes."

"How can that be? Ann Lawrence was my great-grandmother," striking the tips of his first-fingers together and emphasizing his words.

"I suppose your branch of the family has one more generation than mine."

"That must be it, but still I am as old as you are, if not older."

"Well," said the judge, "let us examine the records and learn. Here, now, is the date of my own birth, 1830. Here is my father; born in 1790 and died 1850. Here is my grandfather; born in 1750 and died in 1815. And here is the original Barton, who died in 1780. His birth is not given. He was my great-grandfather."

"And my great-great-grandfather. It seems you are a nearer heir than I."

"Yes, if you are not mistaken. Let me see the records. Here is your own birth set down for 1828. Here is your father, Paul Madison, born in 1804 and died in 1845. Here is your grandfather, William Madison, born in 1782 and died in 1815. Here is your great-grandmother, Ann Lawrence Madison; born in 1755 and died in 1810. And then comes the original, who certainly is your great-great-grandfather. It seems a little strange at first glance, but here it is as plain as can be."

"And our own children—"

"They are pretty far down the line."

"And there are other branches of the family, too."

"Yes, several; but we have no record of them. Barton and Ann had each several children; whose names and dates of birth are given here, but that is all we know about them."

"But this notice we have just received states that the number of heirs now living is eight."

"True enough."

"And does that include our daughters?"

"Well, now you have me. Let me think. I—yes, yes, decidedly. The old letter says distinctly that the remainder of the wealth is to be divided equally among all the living heirs."

"So it does! Well, then, we and our daughters are four of the mentioned eight. Who are the other four?"

"We can only wait and learn."

"Of course you intend to obey the summons to be present at the Colorado House on the day named?"

"Certainly. And you?"

"I shall be there if I am alive."

At that moment the judge's pretty daughter burst into the room.

CHAPTER X.

WHAT AN EAVESDROPPER HEARD.

LULU LAWRENCE was a pretty, black-eyed girl, twenty years of age, and her fond father's idol.

She was the acknowledged belle of Silver Nugget.

When she burst into her father's presence so abruptly, as mentioned, she had expected to find him alone; and she paused as abruptly, with the exclamation:

"Oh! pardon my intrusion, father; I thought I should find you alone. Good-morning, Mr. Madison."

"Good-morning," the postmaster responded; and then the girl was about to retire, when her father said:

"Hold on, Lulu; did you want to see me?"

"Yes, but I can wait."

"What is that you have in your hand?"

It was a large envelope.

"It is a mysterious note I have just received, and it is that I wanted to see you about. It is something I do not understand."

"What is it?" with a glance at Mr. Madison.

"Here, look at it; I really don't know what it is."

Judge Lawrence took the envelope from his daughter's hand, saw that it bore her name, and took out the sheet it contained.

It was the same summons he and Mr. Madison had received, and the same that we have seen received by Rainbow Rob and Alvin Howe. It was the fifth thus far, to our knowledge.

"What does it mean?" Lulu asked, when her father had read it.

"It means just what it says," the judge replied. "It means that you must be present at the Colorado House, at ten o'clock in the forenoon, on the second day of October."

"Yes, of course; I can see that; but what am I to be there for?"

"To be present at the opening of the silver casket."

"And what is the silver casket?"

The judge explained the case at length, and his daughter stood and gazed at him like a child listening to a fairy-tale.

"And do you believe it?" she demanded.

"I do," her father assured.

"And do you, Mr. Madison?"

"Certainly. It is proven to us. Why these mysterious notices, if there is nothing in it?"

"Sure enough. And—oh! I can never wait for the day to come, I know I can't. I shall die of curiosity. What a strange story it is!"

"It is indeed!"

"And nobody knows what is in the casket?"

"No."

"Nor where it is?"

"No; except him who has it in keeping."

"And you, Mr. Madison, you are our relative?"

"Yes, so it appears."

"And Claudia and I are some degree of cousins?"

"Yes, I suppose so."

"Oh! but isn't it strange! I shall go up and see Claudia at once." And she was gone instantly.

"It will almost turn their silly heads," the postmaster remarked.

"Yes, if they are silly enough to let it do so," the judge agreed. And then he added:

"Say, Henry, how is it you have never mentioned this affair to me?"

"Not mentioned it to you? I?"

"Yes, exactly."

"Why, how could I?"

"Did not the name of Barton Lawrence in the old letter remind you that my name is the same?"

"Not until this very morning. You see I had not looked at the papers for years. Besides, you are called 'Judge' Lawrence so much that people lose sight of the fact that you have a front name."

"Yes, that is true, and the explanation is reasonable enough."

"Well, we have learned one thing."

"What is that?"

"We have proof that our children *are* included in the mentioned 'eight.' The fact that your daughter has received one of the notices settles it."

"Yes, you are right. And now the great question is, who *sent* these notices?"

"It must be some one who is now right here in town."

"Yes, true enough. Have you taken notice of any strangers around?"

"There are always strangers here. It will be impossible for us to find out who the person is unless he sees fit to make himself known."

"I think so."

"And, by the way, had we not better keep the matter as secret as possible?"

"I think so."

"So do I. I will tell the girls to do the same."

Some further conversation was carried on, and then the postmaster took his leave.

In the mean time Lulu Lawrence had gone to the post-office to see her friend, Claudia Madison.

Claudia was a girl about her own age, and people in general claimed that she was fully as good-looking, even though Lulu did hold first place.

Hers was a different order of beauty, her eyes being blue, and her hair a light golden color.

When Lulu entered the office she found Claudia leaning over her father's desk, a letter spread open before her.

One glance sufficed to show what it was.

It was another of the mysterious notices.

"Oh, Lulu, I am so glad you are here!" Claudia cried, when she saw who had come in. "Just come here and see what I have got."

Lulu replied not, but advanced to the desk, and laid her own letter down beside the other.

Claudia looked at her in great surprise.

"What in the world does it mean?" she asked.

"Just what it says," Lulu replied, provokingly.

"It must be some joke."

"No, it is not."

"Do you know anything about it?"

"Yes, a little."

"Then tell me, for goodness' sake."

"What will you give to know?" asked Lulu, still teasingly.

"If you don't tell me at once, I believe I will scratch you. Can you not see how anxious I am? Here it speaks of Mr. Barton Lawrence. That is your father's name."

"Yes, so it is; and this man was his great-grandfather."

"Then there *must* be something in it. Oh, Lulu, *please* tell me what you know about it."

"Well, I will. First, though, tell me how you received yours."

"It was put into the post-box. I do not know how *pa* missed seeing it, for I know he received one just like it; but when he found his he called me to attend the office, and he went off up-stairs at once. I was busy, and did not come in at once, and when I did come in he was just going out. Then when I began to make up the mail I found it. Where did you get yours?"

"It was put in under the door, with one for *papa*, too, and the servant who found them carried mine up to my room, where I found it a little later. And now to tell you all I know about it."

Lulu began, then, and explained all she knew, Claudia listening as eagerly as she had previously done.

To them it was even more of a surprise and matter of wonder than it had been to their fathers, for to them the story of the silver casket was entirely new.

While they were talking Mr. Madison came in, and Claudia called his attention to the notice she had received.

"I expected you would get one," he said. And then he added:

"Judge Lawrence and I have been talking this strange affair over, my girls, and we have concluded that it is best not to let the matter become known."

"Then you do not want us to mention it to *any* one?" queried Claudia.

"I certainly think it will be better not to do so."

"Very well, then we will keep it a secret, shall we not, Lulu?"

"Certainly, if our fathers desire it."

"I know it will be a hard task for you," the

old postmaster remarked, his honest eyes all a-twinkle.

"Oh! will it?" exclaimed Lulu, with a toss of her pretty head. "Indeed, Claudia, let us show him that we *can* keep a secret, even though we *are* girls."

"Of course we can," echoed Claudia, "and we *will*."

After half an hour or so Lulu set out to return home.

She had gone but a short way from the post-office when she was overtaken by Ivan Oswald, the owner and proprietor of the Colorado House, who lifted his hat, saying:

"Good-morning, Miss Lawrence. Seeing you just ahead of me, I quickened my pace to overtake you."

"Good-morning, Mr. Oswald," Lulu responded, pleasantly, as she glanced quickly up.

"What a charming morning it is!"

"It is indeed. Where are you going? if I may inquire."

"I am going home."

"Then, with your permission, I will walk with you, since I am going that way."

"You may, certainly."

"Thanks."

We have mentioned before that Dame Rumor expressed it as her opinion that Ivan Oswald and Lulu Lawrence were far along on the pleasing road that leads to matrimony. And perhaps the good dame had ample reason for her opinion, for the pair were very frequently seen together.

The owner of the Colorado House was, of a verity, paying her marked attentions.

What her feelings toward him were, we will not attempt to foretell. He had not at this time declared his intentions.

We can well imagine what her feeling would have been, however, had she known that he had been standing under the rear window of the room occupied as the post-office, and purposely listening to the conversation between her and her friend Claudia.

Such a part Ivan Oswald had just been playing, and from what we have already seen of him we need not feel surprised.

The post-office stood adjoining the hotel, and the rear window was partly open. Ivan happened to be in the yard, when the voices of the two girls reached his ears and he drew near and played the part of an eavesdropper.

And he felt that he had been amply rewarded for his pains.

He had learned who four of the heirs of the mysterious silver casket were.

He entered the house when Lulu set out for home, and passing right through and out, soon overtook her.

He conversed with her pleasantly all the way, lifted his hat politely at parting, and continued on down the street.

Lulu entered the house, and went at once to the library.

"Here, *papa*," she said, "put this letter away with yours, and—"

She paused abruptly, felt in the other pocket of her loose sacque, and then exclaimed:

"Why, I have lost it!"

Out she flew, and back the way she had come, but she did not find it. At the post-office she inquired, and both she and Claudia searched diligently, but still it remained missing. Nor did she find it.

On her way home again she met Ivan Oswald, and asked him if he had seen it.

His answer was that he had not.

CHAPTER XI.

IVAN OSWALD'S SCHEME.

WE must return to the scene of the previous night in the hotel office.

When Ivan Oswald returned to consciousness, after fainting at sight of the terrible apparition that had appeared before him so suddenly, the first thing he clearly realized was that the silver casket was gone.

And then he came to his full senses with a jump.

To have the prize torn from his hands thus, was more than he could, or would, stand.

So he at first resolved.

There was some trick about the matter, he believed. Ghosts, he decided, were not in the habit of carrying things away with them.

He went at once to the doors to see which one had been unlocked, or which one he had possibly neglected to fasten.

Both were locked exactly as he had left them.

This fact caused him great uneasiness, for in no other way was it possible for a mortal to enter.

Had his visitor really been what it seemed?

There were few possible places in the small room for any person to conceal himself, and these were soon explored.

Ivan Oswald was the only person there.

With a dreadfully uncomfortable feeling of uneasiness and fear, the young man threw himself down in the chair before the table and looked at the wreck of the wooden box in which the silver casket had so long rested.

"Curse it!" he muttered, "after all my labor,

to be fooled thus! And just as I had the prize in my hands, too. Ha! what is this?"

His eyes rested upon a little slip of paper that he had not noticed before.

Catching it up eagerly, he read:

"Thou fool! After all these years, dost imagine my plans shall be upset by thee? Thou fool! Thou traitor!"

The paper fell from his trembling hands, and he leaned back in his chair, pale as death.

What could it mean? What could be the mysterious power at work? He could not guess.

The other paper, he noticed, the one signed "Franklin Howard," which he had found in the wooden box, was gone.

For a long time he sat silent, buried in thought. But gradually his nerves grew steady, his fears passed away, and he became more like his usual self.

Going out into the bar-room, then, he took another strong drink of brandy.

"By heavens!" he hissed, "I will know the truth. I will solve this mystery, and that silver casket shall be returned to me. I will not be balked thus. I am no believer in ghosts, and there was some clever trick about the thing I saw. But, the thing was fleshless, the doors were locked; they were locked when I came to; and the casket was gone—is missing."

With spiteful movements he picked up the now despoiled and empty box, and replaced it in the safe, locked the safe, and then gathered up his files, and cleared away the dirt he had made.

"It is strange—strange. It is something too deep for me to understand. But the end of the game is not reached, and I may get another deal before it is. I am in to stay, and I intend to win if it is possible."

"It is a strange affair from the beginning. In the year 1780, as I have the story, there lived in New York one Barton Lawrence. He was an old miser. He was thought and believed to be immensely rich, though he lived in a very moderate style. He had a son and daughter. The son was an evil, worthless fellow; the daughter was goodness and purity itself. Old Barton, at his death, provided well for the daughter, and equally well for the son; but what he left them both was not more than a quarter of the fortune he was believed to possess. The remainder of his wealth he willed to his descendants, to be divided equally among them all on the one hundredth anniversary of the day of his death."

"He died October 2, 1780."

"That remaining wealth, or the secret of its hiding-place, or *something*, he put into a silver casket, locked it, and delivered the key to one Franklin Howard, who sealed it on the day of the old miser's death."

"Franklin Howard was old Barton Lawrence's devoted friend. The old miser had once saved his—Howard's—life, and had more than once saved him from financial ruin. To this man old Barton intrusted the silver casket, with full instructions, exacting a solemn and binding oath that he would carry out his wishes, and declaring that he would haunt him if he proved false to the trust."

"Franklin Howard accepted the charge, and the miser left sufficient money, well secured, to defray the expenses for a century; for besides being responsible for the casket, Howard was to keep an accurate record of the Lawrence family, in all its branches."

"In 1795 Franklin Howard died, leaving the trust to his son Franklin, then aged forty. In 1820 he died, leaving the trust to his eldest son, then aged forty-five."

"It was Franklin Howard the second who put the casket in the wooden box and bound it so securely with iron."

"When Howard the third died, in 1840, he had a numerous family, and he left the silver casket to his *youngest* son, then aged twenty-five."

"This son, Jabez Howard by name, was a cripple, but was full of mental vigor, and the endowment old Lawrence had made for the one who would accept the trust, made him a splendid and assured life-long income. In 1875 he became very ill, and feared he would die. He had never married, and of course had no son to leave the trust of the silver casket to. In this emergency he chose a grandson of one of his elder brothers. This was a young man, twenty-five years of age, named Basil Howard. To him Jabez confided the secret, made his will, and prepared to die. He was seriously ill for many months, but at last he got well. Then he learned that Basil Howard had disappeared, taking the silver casket and all the records with him."

"And it was about five years ago that the casket and records came into *my* possession. Ha, ha, ha! yes, just about five years ago. And the records I was stupid enough to lose. The silver casket, however, I held on to, but now that is gone too."

"Curses upon my stupid luck! But, my hand is not so badly weakened, after all, though it might be stronger. I know that Judge Lawrence of this town is one of the heirs, and I shall lay myself out to win his daughter's hand in marriage. This will make my grip secure."

Who the other heirs are, I do *not* know, for I lost the records before I had time to study them.

"Yes, it is a strange case, and not the least strange thing about it is: Where is the silver casket now? After all my labor, to be fooled as I have been! But, by heavens! I will know the truth of the matter. I will have that casket again in my possession."

The hour was far ahead into the night when Ivan Oswald finally left the office and went up to his room.

Late as it was, though, he was up at his usual hour when morning came, and all traces of his night's work and excitement were gone.

He had his eyes and ears open wide for any chance clew to the mystery of the night, but nothing came to him.

When he chanced to be in the rear yard, however, and heard the voices of Claudia Madison, and Lulu Lawrence in the post-office, he was tempted to listen to their conversation, and did.

"Ah-ha!" he muttered, "so the Madisons too, are heirs of the old miser's, eh? Good! This is one point gained. And these mysterious notices they have received. Why do they not oblige me by reading one aloud? By heavens! I must get possession of one of them and read it for myself. How, though, am I to. Ah! just the idea, and I will try it."

His mode of procedure has been shown, and when he told Lulu Lawrence, in answer to her inquiry, that he had not seen her letter, he lied. The big envelope was in his pocket at the moment. He had deftly picked it from hers.

When he returned to the hotel he went at once to his room, locked the door, and then drew the slip of paper from his pocket and read it.

"Mystery of mysteries!" he exclaimed. "I wonder where this will end? With the casket in my possession, and all the records lost, I thought the plans of that old dolt of a Lawrence must miscarry. But it seems they are not very likely to. There *must* be some supernatural power back of it all. Well, I now know who *four* of the mentioned eight are. Who are the others? And how will the fortune, if it is a fortune, be divided? I believe, though, it is to be divided equally among them all. And there are eight—one-eighth to each. It may mean a million dollars for each. Oh, by heavens! the fair Lulu must be mine before that eventful day, and, by heavens! she shall be, too. I fancy I shall have an easy victory, though. And if not—well, in that case, I shall have to cut out young Howe and marry the fair Claudia. It makes little difference which, in an emergency like this, though I would prefer my pretty Lulu."

"If I could have foreseen how this would come out, I believe I would have— But, that is past. The case now stands as it stands, and I must make the most of it. I must set to work now to learn more about the matter, and if possible find out who the mysterious person is who has the case in hand. Would it pay me to employ a detective? No. I will be my own detective, with the assistance of one or two good men—or rascals—whose services I can command if I want them."

Replacing the note in the envelope, and putting the envelope carefully away in an inside pocket of his coat, he left his room and went down to the bar-room.

There Sheriff Barkmore was just putting up his notice of reward offered for Sulphur Sam.

The proprietor of the Colorado had heard all about the exciting affair of the previous night in the Green Bottle, and was naturally interested.

"I am told Sulphur Sam called to see you last night, Barkmore," he remarked.

"Yes, curse his impudence!" the sheriff growled. "It won't be healthy for him to show himself in this town again, though."

"He certainly had a nerve to come here and do as he did."

"You're right he had; but, from all accounts, he's built of nerve. He is a dare-devil, and no—Great Scott! what has broke loose now?"

A wild yelling was heard without, pistol-shots were firing, and the sound of a running horse could be distinguished.

Both the sheriff and the proprietor sprang to the door, as did every one else in the room, and what they saw surprised them not a little.

Dashing down the street at full speed, yelling at the top of his voice, and firing a revolver with each hand, was the daring black rider of the previous night, Sulphur Sam, the road-agent.

CHAPTER XII.

A MYSTERIOUS MESSAGE.

ALVIN HOWE, the agent and operator at the railroad station, was seated in his office, not very busy, awaiting the arrival of the afternoon train from Denver.

But his thoughts were busy, and concerning the mysterious note he had that morning received.

Where was that notice now?

He could not imagine, unless it had been carried away in mistake by Rainbow Rob.

That, he concluded, must be the true explanation of it.

He had not seen the notice since Rainbow Rob was there, but he had no reason to believe that Rob had taken it purposely. If he had taken it at all, it must have been by mistake.

If not that, if Rainbow Rob had not taken it, then he could not imagine who had, nor what had become of it.

However, the Denver train would soon be in, and then if Rob returned, as he had said he expected to do, the question could soon be settled.

Not that he, Howe, cared for the loss of the notice so much, but the mystery of its disappearance puzzled him, and besides he had had barely time to read it over at leisure since he found it.

While he sat there by his desk near the window, listening to the clicking of the telegraph instruments and watching the people on the platform, he was suddenly startled to have a small but weighty envelope drop with a slight noise upon the desk before him.

He picked it up at once and looked at it, naturally enough, and found that it was addressed thus:

"TELEGRAPH OPERATOR."

Then he looked around to see where it had come from.

There were two ticket-windows in the office, both of which were open wide, and the other window, the one facing the platform, was open a little at the top.

Howe first glanced out into the waiting-rooms, but there was no one in either room whom he could suspect of having thrown the envelope in through either of the windows.

Then he went outside to the platform.

There were several there whom he knew: one being his assistant at the station, another a boy who carried the mail bag to and from the post-office, and others.

He questioned his assistant first.

"Did you see any one put this letter in there over the window?" he asked.

"No," the assistant replied, "I did not. Why? was it put in there?"

"I think it was. It just now fell upon the desk before me from some direction."

"That's rather queer; but I didn't see nobody throw it in."

"Of course it might have been done, though, without your knowing it."

"Lord, yes! it could 'a' been done a dozen times. I've been lookin' all round."

"I'll ask Tom."

"Yes, maybe he seen somethin' of it; he's seen' most everything that goes on."

Tom was the boy who carried the mail.

Approaching him, the agent put the same question.

No, the boy had seen no one stop near the window.

Nor had the operator himself, and he had been looking out at the passengers and others for ten minutes or more.

His questioning threw no light upon the matter whatever.

He was just returning to the office to open the letter and learn what it contained, when the whistle of the coming train was heard, and for the next ten minutes he was too busy to think about it.

Among the passengers who alighted from the train was Rainbow Rob.

What the call had been that had taken him to Denver, only he knew.

He entered the gentlemen's waiting-room, and waited until the rush was over and Howe was again at leisure, and then he went into the office.

"Here I am again, like a bad penny," he said cheerfully. "You haven't grown much older since I saw you last."

"Glad to see you back again," Howe responded. "Step inside here and sit down."

Rainbow Rob obeyed, stepping within the inclosing railing and helping himself to a chair.

"I had no intention of robbing you, my distant relative," he remarked, "but when I went out of here this morning I gathered up your letter among my other papers. Here it is."

"Yes, I missed it, and thought perhaps you had taken it that way. I meant to ask you. Thanks."

"You're welcome, of course. And I believe we agreed to have a little further conversation about the matter, did we not?"

"Yes, and— Oh! by the way," as he drew the lately received letter from his pocket, "here's another mystery."

"Another mystery?"

"Yes."

"What is it this time?"

"I have not opened it yet to learn. I was sitting here by the desk a few minutes before the train came, when this envelope suddenly dropped down in front of me."

"Dropped down in front of you? Where did it drop from?"

"I do not know."

"Was the window open at the top as it is now?"

"Yes; and so were both the ticket-windows."

"And the door?"

"Closed."

"Then the envelope was certainly put in over the top of this window by some one standing on the higher part of the platform. A man could just about reach over to the top of the window from there."

"Yes, that is so, and that is what I have decided upon to explain it."

"And of course you went out at once and inquired, and found out who did it?"

"Yes and no. I went out and inquired, but I learned nothing. No one had seen anybody put anything in over the window. In fact, no one had been seen standing near the window at all."

"Well, it is a little singular, but still any careful man could toss a letter in there without being seen if he watched his chance. Come, though, instead of speculating on that part of the mystery, why not open the envelope and learn what is in it?"

"Just what I intend to do, and here goes."

As he spoke the operator tore the envelope open and drew forth its contents.

In a little piece of old newspaper was wrapped some money, and there was a slip of paper besides.

On that slip of paper was written a message, with a request at the top for the operator to send it at once.

It ran as follows:

"SILVER NUGGET, COL., Sept. 15, 1880.
"To JABEZ HOWARD, Esq., 295 West 35th street, New York:—

"All is safe. Seven of the eight are found. Am looking for the one."

"MARTIN McDONALD."

Howe read it and then passed it over to Rob.

"It's not the rule to show private messages," he said, "but I fancy we are both interested in this one."

Rainbow Rob read it.

"Yes, I think we are," he agreed. "'Seven of the eight are found.' Seven of what eight? The eight heirs mentioned in the mysterious notices we have received?"

"That is what I think."

"And so do I."

"Then five others besides us have been found, and there is still one missing."

"That is it exactly."

"I would give something to know who they are."

"And so would I."

"I have been thinking the affair over quite a little," said Rob, "and I have come to the conclusion that it will be wise for us to keep this thing as secret as possible."

"And so I think, too," declared Howe. "I do not see how we can do ourselves any good by letting out that we are concerned in the matter."

"You are right; and we might possibly do ourselves harm—or the case, at least. You see, this person, this McDonald, whoever he is, is acting decidedly in secret."

"Yes, he certainly is, and he must have reasons for so doing."

"And his reasons, though we do not know them, may apply to us, too. I had some idea of speaking to Judge Lawrence about the matter, but now I think I shall not do so. We had better let the case take its own course."

"I think so. But, you intend to be present at the Colorado House at the time named, do you not?"

"Well, rather."

"Who is this McDonald?"

"Give it up. I never heard of him."

"Nor of Jabez Howard?"

"Never."

"Do you intend to remain here at Silver Nugget until October second?" Howe presently asked.

"I cannot say," Rob replied. "I shall certainly make this town my headquarters till then, though, and shall be there on that day, as I said."

"Any harm done to inquire what your business is?"

"Not the least. I am simply a roving sport, trying to crowd as much fun and excitement into every twenty-four hours as I can."

"You are well-fixed then, I should venture to guess."

"Not particularly so. I have enough to drag along with, however."

"Wish I could say the same. I have to crowd about as much work into every twenty-four hours as I can."

"You are unfortunate. However, there is a good time coming, perhaps."

"The second of October, eh?"

"Ha, ha, ha! Yes, that day may be the gilt-edge day of our lives. Who can tell?"

"I certainly shall not object to a little gilt."

"Where do you board? Perhaps, though, you are married."

"No, I'm not. I board down at Green's, the other side of the Colorado. Where are you stopping?"

"At the Colorado. And I guess I'll be going

on down there. I'm keeping you from your work."

"Not at all. I've not much to do to-day. I must rattle off this message though, or perhaps the next object I find dropping in mysteriously will be a club."

"Ha, ha! true enough, and all the more reason I should take myself off. By the way, where do you spend your evenings?"

"Sometimes one place, sometimes another. I frequent the Green Bottle a good deal."

"Quite a saloon, that. I may see you there to-night, if you happen in."

"No doubt I will drop in for a little while. There was quite a lively time there last night, I am told."

"Yes, I was there. The place was visited by an outlaw called Sulphur Sam."

"And he was here again this morning. He came down the Old Trail from across the canyon, and went through the town like the wind, yelling like a wild Sioux and firing his revolvers."

Rainbow Rob seemed interested.

"He will come once too often," he remarked, as he went away.

CHAPTER XIII.

TRYPHENA AND ELEAZER.

ELEAZER BROWN visited the post-office nearly every night.

We may as well say he visited there every night, for it was only on Sunday nights, when the office was closed, that he omitted calling.

And nearly every night he got a letter.

Once in a while it would be a letter from some distant relative with whom he corresponded, but much oftener it would be a letter from Tryphena Marks.

Eleazer's regularity in calling at the office was not owing to his anxiety to hear from the fair Tryphena, but to his fear lest her letters might fall into other hands.

If one of her letters ever happened to be read by any of the boys at the mine, he knew that he would never hear the end of it.

They would make his life a burden to him.

Even as it was they suspected whom his numerous letters were from, and teased him as they could.

He took good care, however, not to let any one see them, and burned them all as soon as read.

Yes, he read them all, but never a one had he ever answered.

On the evening of the day of which the last preceding chapter treats, Eleazer called at the post-office as usual.

The mail had just arrived, and there was quite a crowd in the office when Eleazer entered.

"Hello! Here's Eleazer!" some one exclaimed. "Ye don't reckon she's writ ag'in ter-day, do ye, Ele?"

"I reckon she has," Eleazer answered, for he took these shots all in good part; "an' if she ain't she'd orter, anyhow."

"Who is that? The fair Tryfeener?" another inquired.

"Of course it is," announced some one else. "Don't ye know how mighty sweet she is on Ele here?"

"That so, Eleazer?"

"So they all say," Eleazer answered, "but th' letters ain't from her jest th' same."

"Ho, ho, ho! that'll do fer you ter tell. Tryfeener is jest as sweet on you as kin be, and them letters ain't from nobody else. Ye da'sen't let us see th' post-mark, I bet!"

"I don't reckon I'm goin' ter, fer it ain't nobody's business where my letters come from, I guess."

"Wal, wal, don't git mad, Ele; I was in love once myself, an' I know how it is. Have ye been round ter see her lately?"

"See who?"

"Tryfeener, of course."

"No, I ain't."

"Too bad; ye'd orter go round an' sort o' cheer th' little gal up once in a while."

"Ha, ha, ha!" from the crowd.

Eleazer took it all as good-naturedly as possible, however, and thus made the sport for his tormentors less than it would have been if he had got angry.

In due time the mail was all sorted and the door thrown open to the public.

The crowd formed in line and advanced to the opening, each one of course receiving whatever there happened to be there for him.

When Eleazer's turn came he raised himself up on his toes to bring his eyes up to a level with the little door, the bottom of which was five feet from the floor, and queried:

"Eleazer Brown?"

Yes, there it was, the usual dainty, white and scented missive.

Claudia Madison, who usually delivered the mail at the window, understood the situation, and always passed Eleazer's letter out to him face downward.

"He's got it, boycees!" the man directly behind him exclaimed.

"Whar from?" was the general cry.

"From Tryfeener, of course."

There was another general laugh, and amid it

all Eleazer thrust his letter into his pocket and started for his boarding-house.

Tryphena Marks was the burden of his life, the nightmare of his existence.

He had to watch the post-office like a hawk watches its prey, for he well knew that if he was not on hand some of his fellow boarders would ask for his mail and bring it to him, thus learning the truth of the matter.

They might do that, and they might do worse.

They might be rascally enough to open the letter and read it.

Eleazer would almost as soon have surrendered his scalp to a Sioux chief. If the contents of one of those letters ever became generally known, life would have no charms for him.

It never occurred to him to give directions at the post-office to deliver his mail to no one but him.

When he reached home he went at once to his room, locked the door, and then opened the letter and read it.

From Tryphena it was; her usual old-time, musk-scented, genuine orthodox love-letter, as we have before described it. It was pasted all over with little clusters of forget-me-nots, was full of endearing terms, was fairly overflowing with tender gushes of love, and it ended thus:

"If you love me as I love you,
No knife can cut our love in two.

"TRYPHENA MARKS."

"Good Lord!" Eleazer muttered, "won't she never take a tumble an' let up on this soft nonsense? If she wasn't so confounded tall an' me so condemned short, I don't know but I might be tempted ter brace up an' marry her; but as it is—Oh Lord!" and he fairly shuddered at the idea.

"Why, if she got onto a rampage an' undertook to boss th' ranch, where would I be? No, no, Tryphena, it won't do. You'll have ter go fer some feller nearer yer own size. I was built too short at one end an' not quite tall enough at t'other, while you have growed too long at both ends."

"It's no go, Tryphena. Th' more you make love ter me th' more I'm goin' ter hang back. An' I'll be glad when this leap-year ends. If I hadn't a good job here I'd pick up an' git out. I would, I swear to goodness! I'm actually afeerd o' that woman. If she ever gits holt o' me, an' there's a gospel-slinger handy, I'll be a goner as sure as fate. I feel it in my bones. I like th' gal purty well, but she's too long. But th' more I try ter hang back an' keep out o' her way, th' closer she crowds me. The case is growin' decidedly interestin', hang me if it ain't, an' where it'll end only th' good Lord knows."

"An' she wants me ter write to her, 'jest one little line—one little word of love.' Tryphena, I'd like to, I swear to goodness; but I'm afeerd of ye. I reckon ye'll have ter watch th' post with throbbing heart in vain. It seems like a shame to burn this nice-smellin' note, with all th' purty posies on it, but it'll have ter be did, so here goes. Good-night, Tryphena."

As he spoke he lifted the chimney from the lamp and held the letter in the flame, and then watched it until it was consumed.

Then, the great responsibility of the day being off his mind, he went out to enjoy the evening.

And Tryphena, what of her?

There was no doubt that she really loved Eleazer Brown, or thought she did, which amounted to the same thing.

And she was determined to win him if possible.

He had made a captive of her heart by his flirtation, though it had been a captive many times before, and now she was determined that she would capture him bodily.

And she viewed the case in the wrong light.

Her idea was that Eleazer was hanging back because he was smaller than the average. Because he was too sensitive. She seemed to be blind to the fact that she was a great deal larger than the average.

"He began it first," was her argument, and he'll find that I am not the woman to allow my affections to be trifled with. If he is too bashful to make love to me, because he's a little man, I'll make love to him. Thank goodness this is leap-year, and I have a right to do it. I shall write him a letter every day. I love him, oh! I do love him, little as he is."

Undoubtedly she did.

And if Eleazer watched the post-office closely for the reasons we have named, none the less closely did Tryphena watch it, hoping to receive a reply from her adored one.

But she did not call at the office in person.

One of her near neighbors had a little boy, and him she engaged, at the expense of a penny or a stick of candy, to make two trips to the post-office daily.

On the evening of which we now write, this boy returned from the office and burst into Tryphena's little shop with a shout.

"Oh! Missus Marks!" he exclaimed, "I've got the letter this time!"

Tryphena trembled with exciting joy, and a flush came to her cheeks.

"Oh! have you?" she cried joyfully, as she sprung up; "have you really? But, you must not call me Mrs. Marks, but Miss Marks. Oh! you dear boy, you have a letter, haven't you? Here—here are two pennies this time, and now run along home."

The moment the boy was gone the trembling maiden sunk down upon her chair, actually crying for joy.

"Dear, dear, dear Eleazer!" she cried, as she kissed the envelope, "he has written at last. I knew he would—oh! I knew he would! And what good writing, too," as she held it off and gazed at it.

The envelope was directed:

"MISS TRYPHENA MARKS,
"Silver Nugget."

"And such a large envelope, too," she added. "I wonder why he did not use a smaller one, regular love-letter size? Oh! I know why! It is because he is so small himself, and he wants to make me forget that. Dear Eleazer! I would love you just the same if you were no bigger than Tom Thumb. And now I must see what he says. How my hands shake! How nervous I am!"

Cutting off the end of the envelope with her scissors she drew out the sheet it contained.

It was a small sheet of heavy paper, and on it appeared this:

"1780. THOU ART ONE. 1880.

"TRYPHENA MARKS, thou art one of—"

But there is no need to repeat it all, for we know the rest of it well enough.

For a long time Tryphena sat and gazed at it in silence, and then she exclaimed:

"It is so, it is so! I am to be rich—rich! Those old papers, the silver casket, the secret—Oh! it is true—true! And now how happy my Eleazer shall be! I will tell him all, and—"

But she stopped abruptly.

"No, I will not tell him," she cried. "I will keep it a secret, and he must marry me for myself alone. But after we are married, then—oh! then I will make him happy! He does not know what is in store for him. But I do, and he shall be mine. I will make love to him now in real earnest."

And then she drew up to the table to write her love a letter.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SPOT SAINT FIGHTS.

"SINNERS, repent!"

So exclaimed the Spot Saint from Scarecrow as he entered the Green Bottle Saloon.

It was about the usual hour of evening when the saloon did its best stroke of business, and the place was well filled.

"Hello! hello!" cried Dan Gilbert, who was present as large as life, "here comes the Spot Saint! How are ye, Saint? How d'e do?"

"I am well, my friend, I thank you," was the reply. "How are you?"

"Oh, I'm so's ter set up, thank ye. How is yer mission comin' on?"

"It does not flourish as I should like it to, my friend. In fact, the soil is so barren that the seed does not seem to take root. Still, I do not despair. I have hopes. Once the seed takes root, my cause will grow and flourish like the green bay."

"Made any converts?"

"Only one."

"Ho, ho! Then you have corraled one, have ye?"

"Yes, I have secured one."

"And who is he?"

"He was a very degraded man indeed. I did not learn his name."

"He was sich, ye say; ain't he round any more?"

"No; he died."

"Ha, ha, ha! I see. It took fatal holt onto him at once, eh?"

"No, no, not so; he was shot in a fight."

"Oh! you must mean Hoss-thief Hank, who got shot last night down in th' Full Hand."

"So they called him, I think, now that you remind me."

"An' did he repent?"

"He did. I happened to drop in at the Full Hand last night, just before I came in here, and was just in time to see the fray. The moment the man was down I sprung to his side and said:

"'Sinner,' said I, 'you're called. Now is your time to repent.'

"'Go to blazes!' cried he, 'and let me get a parting shot at that blankety-blank-blank, two dashes and a blank, and more blanks son of a blank!'

"'No, no, my friend,' said I, 'it is too late. Now is your time, your only time, to repent.'

"He would not listen, but struggled furiously to get another shot at the man who had hit him."

"You see I was between them."

"Suddenly the other man thrust his revolver right under my arm, fired another shot, and the wounded man fell back dying."

"'Stranger,' he cried faintly, 'that settles it! I repent now.' And the next moment he was no more. It was a narrow chance, but he repented."

"Ho, ho, ho! I should say it was! If ye hadn't got thar on th' last round, ye wouldn't ha' got thar a tall."

"I believe you're right; and hence I say my cause is not progressing as I could wish."

"So it was you, was it? you ragged old scarecrow!" suddenly exclaimed another voice, and a rough-looking man of evil countenance was seen making his way toward where the Spot Saint stood. "It was you, eh? I've sort o' been lookin' round ter find ye. I reckon I've got a leetle bone ter pick with ye."

"Yes, it was I, my good fellow," the Spot Saint answered calmly.

"Wal, as I remarked, I've got a leetle p'int o' difference ter argify with ye. D'ye know who I be?"

This man was one Jim Hogan, who was in reality what Dan Gilbert pretended to be—the "terror" of the town. He was a villain really to be feared. If not an outlaw openly he deserved to be classed as such, for his deeds were not the deeds of an honest man. And he was as treacherous as a viper. He was a fighter, a brawler; and under the least provocation his weapons were drawn and used.

And the town boasted—or at least had to own—another of his ilk. This was one Mike Kinnie. And the two were always together. If one got into a fight of any kind, the other was always at hand to deal a treacherous blow in his behalf. Mike was in the saloon on this occasion.

"Let's have no trouble, Jim," said Jerry Lynch, the proprietor, interposing quickly but speaking pacifically. "Th' old man means no harm to any one."

"You 'tend to yer own affairs, will ye," Jim retorted. And then turning again to the Spot Saint, once more demanded:

"Say, d'ye know who I be?"

The old man's reply was calm and deliberate.

"I think I recognize you," he said.

"Oh! ye do, eh? Wal, who be I?"

"You are the coward who shot that man in the Full Hand Saloon last night, shot him when he was down and already mortally wounded."

All who knew Jim Hogan, expected to see him drop the Spot Saint in his tracks.

But the rascal was evidently too surprised to act immediately.

He gazed at the bold speaker for a moment in silence, and then exclaimed:

"I'll tell you who I am, old man; I'm Jim Hogan, who don't allow no man to call him coward! Now you will have ter take back them words, or die."

"When I speak, Mr. Hogan, I say what I mean. I seldom retract."

"Mr. Proprietor," the Spot Saint then requested, turning to Jerry Lynch, "will you take charge of my carpet-bag for a little while?"

"Certainly," Jerry replied, and at the same time he tried to signal to the Saint that he had better let Hogan have his own way to save trouble.

But his signal was not noticed—or if noticed, was not heeded.

"Thanks," the old man said, as he handed his carpet-bag over the bar. "And please take good care of it," he added, "it contains tracts."

Jerry took the bag and placed it under the bar, and then the Spot Saint turned again to Jim Hogan, this time with the remark:

"Mr. Hogan, I am ready to die. I will not take back my words."

Jim Hogan looked amazed.

"Great guns!" he ejaculated, "ye don't mean it!"

"I certainly do," was the calm reply. "I am a man of peace. I love peace, and it is seldom that I am a party to its disturbance. When any man rises up and declares that I must either retract words I have spoken or die, then I am ready to be killed, provided the said man can kill me. I have no doubt that you are a better man than I, but I shall give you a chance to prove it."

Needless to say everybody present was interested. All eyes were turned upon the antagonistic Jim Hogan and the Spot Saint.

And none were more interested than Dan Gilbert, who had already had a taste of the Spot Saint's quality, and those who had witnessed the little difficulty between him and the Saint on the previous night.

Dan and the others knew Jim Hogan's prowess, but they felt that the Spot Saint possessed powers equal to his.

His coolness and confidence seemed to proclaim it silently.

"So yer want ter die, do yer?" Hogan demanded fiercely.

"Not so," the Spot Saint returned. "You have said, though, that I must retract my words or die, and I will not retract them. Now what are you going to do about it?"

"What be I goin' ter do about it?" the ruffian roared; "I'll show yer! I won't kill ye, that would be too tame; but I'm goin' ter lick ye like old blazes. Be ye ready?"

"I am always ready," was the cool response. "It is against my wishes to engage in a fight, but when I am forced to do so I never back out of it."

"All right, glad ter hear it. Ye see, boyees," to the crowd, "this old galoot interfered in a leetle fracas last night where he hadn't no business, an' sort o' spoiled my fun, an' now I'm goin' ter take it out o' his hide."

"I interfered," explained the Saint, "because I am something of a peacemaker. One man was down, mortally wounded, and I supposed the fight was over. I did not know the other was coward enough to shoot him again after he was down. I knew nothing about the quarrel, which was right nor which was wrong, but the man who will fire a second shot at his opponent after he has already dropped him, and in such a cowardly way, is a coward, and I am here to back it up."

Jim Hogan could stand no more. His face turned purple with rage, and he made a spring for the old man's throat.

But he failed to reach it.

The Spot Saint stepped aside with surprising quickness, and he brought up against the bar with full force.

This served to add to his rage, and he turned like a wild animal goaded to madness and thirsting for blood.

"Oh! I'll fix ye!" he cried, and he threw himself upon his enemy with force and fury.

This time the Spot Saint met him.

There was a quick exchange of blows for a moment, and then suddenly Jim Hogan was knocked flying over tables and chairs and laid out upon the floor most ingloriously.

"Sinner, repent," the Saint said in a calm and even tone.

"That's what's th' matter, sinner, as th' feller from Rainbow said last night," shouted Dan Gilbert, "you want ter repent. It'll be good fer yer health ter do so," he added.

The crowd was now interested and excited, both.

They saw in the Spot Saint what they were pleased to call a "chief." And their sympathies were all with him.

And Mike Kinnie, Jim's comrade, was making his way around the wall almost unobserved in order to get a position near the scene of action and behind the Saint.

"Oh! but I'll fix ye fer this!" yelled the bravo, as he staggered to his feet. "I'll cut out yer heart! I didn't mean ter kill ye, but now I'm after yer blood. D'ye hear? I'm after yer blood!"

"Come on, then," the Spot Saint invited, "and draw as much of it as you can. I'm getting old, and my blood may be a little thin, but you're welcome to it."

"Yas, an' I'll have it, too! D'ye see this?" drawing a huge bowie and giving it a flourish; "wal, jest prepare ter feel it tickle yer liver. Look out fer yerself, now!"

With a bound, then, the ruffian threw himself upon the Saint again, and there was a general gasp of horror, for all expected to see him drive his knife deep into his body.

But all present were mistaken. To the great surprise of Hogan himself, and the equally great surprise of the crowd, steel was met with steel.

The Spot Saint proved equal to the emergency.

There were a few lightning-like thrusts and parries, then, and then Jim Hogan's knife was torn out of his hand and sent flying over the heads of the crowd.

"Sinner, will you repent?"

Calmly and earnestly the Spot Saint asked the question, with the point of his bowie pressed against Jim Hogan's throat.

The next instant he, the Spot Saint, was knocked senseless to the floor.

CHAPTER XV.

RAINBOW ROB TO THE FRONT.

It was a surprise to everybody.

No one had expected it.

True, a few had noticed Mike Kinnie in the room, but the attention was so drawn toward the two principal factors of the scene, that no thought was given to him.

But now was realized what his presence had meant.

He had worked his way around the room until he stood behind the Spot Saint, and then, when he saw Hogan defeated and a knife pressing at his throat, he drew a heavy revolver and dealt the Saint a blow behind the ear with its butt.

Down the old man dropped, without even a groan.

And then the cowardly nature of Jim Hogan asserted itself.

"Ye'd kill me, would ye?" he hissed, as he drew another knife; and he threw himself forward to drive its blade into the body of the fallen man.

The crowd was paralyzed with horror, and powerless. Many weapons were drawn, but there was only one brief second in which to act, and every one seemed powerless to shoot, or even to cry out "hold!"

One second, and Hannibal Long, the Spot Saint from Scarecrow would have been not only senseless, but dead.

But Jim Hogan was balked, and by Rainbow Rob, the Tulip from Texas.

Rob was entering the room just at the moment

when Mike Kinnie dealt the cowardly blow from behind, and he stepped forward toward him at once.

And he was just in time, too.

Just as Hogan sprung forward to murder the fallen man, the Tulip from Texas gave Kinnie a push forward, and the two rascals came into violent collision and tumbled to the floor in confusion.

"Hurrah for th' Tulip from Texas!" some one shouted, and instantly the cry was taken up and the room rung with loud cheers.

"Lift the Spot Saint up and take care of him," Rainbow Rob directed those who stood near him, and then he stepped forward to face the two men whom he had sent to the floor so suddenly and unexpectedly, and who were scrambling to their feet.

Friendly hands lifted the heroic old man up and laid him upon a table, and then set to work to restore him to consciousness.

"Who pushed me?" demanded Mike Kinnie, in fierce tones, as he glared around. "Jest show me th' man that laid his hand onto me, an' be heavens I'll make a ghost av him!"

"I did it, you red-mouthed brawler," acknowledged Rainbow Rob, boldly; "and if you want to make a ghost of me, walk right up and begin."

"You, was it?" shouted Jim Hogan. "I'll give ye a lesson 'bout pushin' folks inter folks, or my name ain't what it is."

"What did ye push me fer?" Mike demanded.

"What did you strike that man from behind for?" the Tulip counterquestioned.

"None av yer business!" was the retort.

"That's ther idee," echoed Hogan; "an' we're goin' ter make ye sick fer that push, too. You're too young a rooster ter have spurs, you be, an' we're goin' ter clip 'em fer ye. We'll larn ye whar ye kin interfere an' whar ye can't."

"Well, you see I made it my business," Rob rejoined, "and now I'm ready to take the consequences. I don't know what this little muss commenced about, but I don't believe that old man was in the wrong. If he was—well, he was down, and no man is going to use a knife upon a fallen man when I am on hand. That's my platform, and now make the most of it."

The two "terrors" were now upon their feet, both looking their fiercest, and both with a hand upon their revolvers.

"It seems like a shame, too, ter spoil sich a good-lookin' cuss as you be," remarked Hogan. "It's a pity he hadn't been born with more sense, hey Mike?"

"It is fer a fact, Jim."

"If you had had more sense, young feller," Jim added, "you wouldn't tried ter stop our game."

"And if I hadn't stopped your game," the Tulip returned, "that old man would now be dead, and you would be a murderer."

"D'ye mean ter say we are murderers?" Hogan demanded hotly.

"Shouldn't be surprised to learn that you are, both of you," Rob answered, coolly. "You have a mighty hang-dog look about you."

With fierce oaths the pair of rascals snatched their revolvers from their belts and stepped forward together, but they were not quick enough by half.

Rainbow Rob, with a movement like lightning itself, whipped out a pair of beautiful self-cockers, and before the two men could realize it he had them at a disadvantage.

"Hold!" he cried. "Drop those tools to the floor, or I'll drop you, quick."

His tone was one of command, and Hogan and Kinnie obeyed his order mechanically.

They were too surprised to do otherwise.

The young sport had been standing with his hands in his pockets, idly talking—so it had seemed; but the moment the two attempted to attack him, presto! and he had them covered.

"Sinners, repent."

The words were low-spoken, but they were distinctly audible, and a roar of laughter followed.

The Spot Saint had spoken.

He was beginning to come to when he was picked up, and he opened his eyes and looked around just as the Tulip from Texas got the "drop."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Dan Gilbert, "that was timely said, Saint, an' no mistake. I reckon they'll have ter, same as I did last night. Ha, ha, ha!"

With a little assistance the Spot Saint sat up on the table, rubbing his head ruefully.

"What happened here, anyhow?" he asked.

"You got a clip under th' ear from behind," was explained, "an' got laid out. An' only fer th' Tulip from Texas hear, you'd 'a' been laid out for good, too."

"Ah! did you save my life, sir?" the Saint asked of Rainbow Rob.

"I suppose I saved you from an ugly cut at least," Rob answered. "One of these rascals had just struck you from behind when I came in, knocking you down senseless, and then the other drew a knife and sprung forward to stab you."

"And you saved me, eh? Well, I am much obliged, I assure you, and I won't forget the service. What shall we do with the rascal?"

"You'll have ter do *some*thin' with us, an' do it while ye've got ther drop on us, too," declared Jim Hogan. "If ye don't we'll go fer ye th' minute we git a chance at ye."

"It is for you to say what shall be done with them, sir," said the sport, speaking to the Spot Saint but still keeping his eyes upon the men he held at bay.

"Well," said the old man, "I am willing to let them go and call it square, if they will promise not to molest me again. I have no desire to bring them to grief if I can avoid it, much as they deserve it."

"But we ain't willin' ter call it square," cried Hogan, "not by a big jump we ain't. We want satisfaction, we do, an' we're goin' ter have it, too. An' we're goin' ter have it out o' both o' ye, too."

"Then you are really not willing to be let off and call it square?" queried Rainbow Rob.

"No, we ain't; an' if you want ter save yer skin, ye'd better make sure of us while ye've got ter drop."

"Then you want satisfaction, eh?"

"Bet yer life we do."

"Bound to have it, I suppose."

"You bet! An' if ye want ter keep yer health good, ye'd better make sure of us while ye've got ther drop."

"Shall I shoot you, and disappoint the hang-man?"

"You heard what I said."

"Oh yes, cert! Well, Saint, what shall it be? Shall I invite them out and whip the pair? I feel just like having a little fun."

"Say!" cried Hogan, "that's just th' idee! Let's you an' me step outside, sport, an' settle the thing with our fists."

"Will you be satisfied then?"

"You bet I will! Jest let me git one fair swipe at your purty mug, an' that'll be all th' satisfaction I want."

"No, no," the Spot Saint quickly interposed, now almost himself again, "that must not be. This quarrel is mine, my young friend, and if the gentleman will have the goodness to wait for a moment until I can steady my nerves again, I will attend to them."

"No it ain't *your* quarrel, nuther," declared Hogan. "Not till we've settled with *this* young popinjay. When we've done with him, *then* we will be ready to give you all ye want, an' more."

"Let them have their own way," the Tulip added. "When they have 'done' for me they will be done with you, too, I fancy. I feel just in fighting humor to-night, and I think I can make them 'repent.' I am no great fighter, but I feel it in my bones that I can get away with two such cut-throats as these without much trouble. Let them have their own way."

"Well, since you are determined, and since they are bent upon getting square with you, too, I suppose I shall have to yield the point. I will see that you have fair play, however."

"Very well, and much obliged. And now, Mr. Hang-dog," to Hogan, "how do you want this thing carried on? What kind of satisfaction do you most hanker for? I am willing to accommodate you in any way you can name. Talk right to the point, now, and let's get the unpleasant affair off our hands as soon as possible."

"Oh! it'll soon be over with, my beauty, so don't let that part of it trouble ye. Put away yer barkers, now, an' we'll talk biz."

"I prefer to keep you covered until our plans are arranged. You are not to be trusted."

"You're mighty p'ticular."

"It pays to be particular in dealing with men of your stamp."

"Wal, what d'ye want?"

"That is what I asked you. You say you want satisfaction, and I say I am willing to give it to you. How will you have it?—baked—fried—boiled or fricasseed?"

"Funny, ain't ye? I'll take that out of ye. Will ye put aside yer weepins an' come outside with me, man ter man?"

"I will, with pleasure."

"Say, though," put in Mike Kinnie, "I want ter know where my fun is ter come in. I want satisfaction, too, be heavens!"

"All right, all right," exclaimed the Tulip, "I will attend to you as soon as I have given your partner all he wants. I never do things by halves. I am one of the most peaceful flowers in the whole garden, but when I'm forced into it I'm going to fight. It was the tulip that once played merry Hades with the Dutch in Holland, two hundred and fifty years ago, more or less, as you remember, or perhaps you don't; and I'm a branch of the same family. Now we will get down to business."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE FRAY.

JERRY LYNCH, the proprietor of the Green Bottle, had been "between a fever and a sweat," as the saying is, ever since the trouble had commenced.

He was afraid shots would be exchanged within the saloon, and trembled for the safety of his mirrors and bar-fixtures.

He now raised his voice to protest against any further hostility.

"Gentlemen," he implored, "let me beg of yez not to disturb th' p'ace any more. Call it square all around an' shake hands, an' then step up an' drink wid me."

"Go to blazes!" cried Jim Hogan. "If ye don't shut up, we'll turn yer old ranch inside out!"

"No, you won't!" Rainbow Rob declared; "not just at present, anyhow."

And then turning to the proprietor, he added: "Do not be alarmed, sir. Whatever takes place now will take place out of doors."

"That's right—that's right! Yez can't get no fair show inside, anyhow."

"Well," inquired the Spot Saint, "what is to be done? Are you really in earnest about fighting these men, my young friend?"

"I certainly am," Rob answered, coolly. "And you, if you will, may step forward and disarm them while I keep them covered. I know the treachery of such fellows too well to allow them a chance to play any tricks."

"Throw up your hands, you rascals, and let the Spot Saint go through your pockets and boots!"

The Spot Saint advanced, and in a moment the two men were completely disarmed.

"Make sure they haven't a knife or two in their boots, or at the back of their necks," the Tulip cautioned.

"I have done so," the Spot Saint replied. "They haven't even a toothpick left."

"All right; then they can't play any treacherous games."

"Say, though," cried Hogan, "you've got ter disarm, too."

"Certainly," said Rob, as he put away his weapons, "I expect to, as soon as we get ready for the fray. Now, which of you wants satisfaction first?"

"Me!"

"Me!"

They both shouted at once, or nearly so.

"One at a time, my pippins, one at a time," the Tulip admonished. "You are both bigger than I, and you certainly would not expect me to give you both satisfaction at once. One at a time, if you please."

"Me first, then," cried Hogan.

"All right, then, you first."

"I'm sorry, pardner," Hogan remarked facetiously, turning to Kinnie, "to disappoint ye, an' cheat ye out o' your share of th' fun, but ye'll have ter wait a few months till th' Tulip blooms again—when he gits out of th' hoss-pittle, an' able ter be about."

"Don't be downhearted," Rob instantly added. "I'll give you satisfaction, too, my man, if I have to fight on crutches. I never do things by halves. Now, who will hold my coat and weapons?"

"I will," answered a voice just behind him, and turning, he beheld Alvin Howe, the telegraph operator, standing near.

"Just the man," said Rob, and he took off his coat at once, and then his belt, which was a broad one of fine leather, and contained two revolvers and a fine knife.

This belt was worn in such a way that in front it was covered by the wearer's vest, and to all appearance he was unarmed.

These removed, he next took off his tie and collar.

"Now," he announced, "I am ready."

"Yes, I s'pose so, with a bowie somewhars about ye," Hogan insinuated.

"It is plain that you never heard of Rainbow Rob before," the sport remarked, adding: "It is also plain that you are a treacherous cur, as you have already shown yourself to be, or you would not be so suspicious."

"You s'pected me fu'st."

"Yes, because I know what men of your ilk are. The only weapons I carry are in that belt my friend is holding. I don't ask you to take my word for it, though; come and search me, and be satisfied in that respect, too. I want to give you all the satisfaction I can."

Hogan did not hesitate to accept the invitation.

He stepped forward and searched the spot as carefully and thoroughly as the Spot Saint had searched him.

"All kerreet," he finally decided, "an' now fer th' circus to open."

"How about the town authorities?" questioned Rob. "Will they be likely to interfere?"

"Ho, ho, ho!" laughed Hogan, "beginnin' ter crawfish a'ready, be ye? Ha, ha, ha! I thought you'd show the tender quill afore we got down ter biz."

"You do me wrong," the sport protested. "I want to satisfy you to the full, and if there is any danger of the sheriff and a lot of deputies swooping down upon us before your satisfaction is complete, I would prefer to go outside of the town limits before we begin. I hate like fun to be interrupted right in the enjoyment of a good thing."

"A very sensible suggestion," the Spot Saint seconded.

"It is, indade," Jerry Lynch hastened to affirm.

"That is so," declared Dan Gilbert. "It is ag'in' th' rules o' law an' order at Silver Nugget ter fight in th' streets, or in th' town limits a

tall; an' th' sheriff an' th' mayor, John Barkmore an' Judge Lawrence, ye know, is jest p'izon ag'in' it. I reckon ye'd be safer ter git across th' canyon afore ye begin."

"To thunder with th' sheriff an' th' mayor, an' th' town laws, too!" cried Hogan. "What do we care for 'em? If they go ter puttin' on any frills round us, we'll go fer them, too. We'll settle our little difference right out heur in th' road."

"With all due respect and deference to you," the Tulip from Texas contradicted, "I beg leave to announce that we *won't*. If you have no respect for law and order, I have, and if you want satisfaction out of me you will have to step outside of town limits to take it. This is no wild camp, where every man carries his own law in his pocket or belt; but one of the finest little towns in this State, according to all accounts, and the capital of — county."

"The young man certainly is in the right," declared Spot Saint.

And this was the general opinion. Not that all present had such a steadfast regard for law and order, but they wanted to see the end of the affair, and did not want the "fun" spoiled for them.

"He's skart," observed Mike Kinnie. "He's skart, an' wants a hole to crawl inter."

"Of course he is!" exclaimed Hogan. "If he thinks I'm goin' ter walk a mile or two, and then have him git down an' ax my pardon, an' try ter beg off when we git thar, he's mistaken. I want satisfaction, an' I want it *now*!"

Before any one could guess his intention, he sprung forward as he uttered the last word, aiming a blow at Rainbow Rob's face—a blow heavy enough to fell an ox.

If it was a surprise to others, however, it was just what the Tulip had been looking for.

He saw Hogan gathering himself for a blow as he was speaking, and when the blow came he dodged a little to one side, and allowed it to pass him.

"You're bound to have it, are you?" he muttered.

"You bet I be!" was the instant response, and another heavy blow was given.

But that, like the first, proved a futile one.

The sport dodged again, and then, before Hogan could recover, returned the blow with interest.

"Well, then, *have* it!" he cried, in rejoinder to the rascal's retort, as his arm shot out, and Hogan was lifted from his feet and sent flying over one table, and deposited upon the hard floor under another.

"That was a foul crack," exclaimed the other of the pair, Kinnie, instantly; and before the sport could hardly turn to face him, he had struck a blow.

Rainbow Rob was a practiced boxer, however, and the force of the blow was averted, and the next instant Kinnie, too, was upon his back.

The Spot Saint stepped forward at once, and so did Alvin Howe; but Rob motioned them back.

The Tulip's blood was now "up."

"Don't interfere," he exclaimed, "but let them come! They wanted satisfaction, and now let them get it."

"But they are two to one!"

"No matter, let them come. I have sized them up, and if they can get away with me, I am willing to take all they give."

"All right," the Saint agreed with reluctance; "have your own way, Robert, but I shall see that you have fair play."

"And here, too," added the station agent.

"Here, too," was the cry from many others. Rainbow Rob evidently was not without friends.

It took but a moment for Hogan and Kinnie to pick themselves up, and then at the Tulip they rushed, both at once.

Rob dodged Hogan's blow and parried Kinnie's and then, before the latter could realize what had happened he was upon his back on the floor again.

For a moment the battle between Rob and Hogan was hard and furious.

Hogan was something of a boxer, and aimed his blows well, but the Tulip was the better man, and, just as Kinnie rushed in, again Hogan was knocked out.

Kinnie knew little or nothing about the "manly art," and of course he was quickly disposed of as fast as he could fall and get up again.

Up they got as soon as they could, and at the sport they rushed a third time endeavoring to get hold of him.

Rob fought furiously, knocking their hands away about as fast as they were laid on, and at the same time getting in some telling blows upon their faces, and presently Kinnie was floored once more.

Then the sport pitched into Hogan and punished him severely; punished him, in fact, until he bellowed:

"Hol' on! hol' on! I've got enough!"

"Are you satisfied?" demanded Rob, with a closing cuff.

"Yes, yes! enuff!"

"Got all the satisfaction you want, eh?"

"Yes, I cave."

Kinnie was just preparing for another turn, so Rob went for him, and it took but a moment to make him sing the same tune that Hogan had sung.

Both were fairly and squarely whipped.

And then such a cheer as went up for Rainbow Rob! and such hisses and hoots for the vanquished terrors! And in the midst of it all, Sheriff Barkmore and two of his deputies appeared upon the scene.

CHAPTER XVII. A CHIEF IN SKIRTS.

SHERIFF BARKMORE advanced boldly into the room, and to the scene of action, and demanded: "What is going on here?"

"It's only a leetle scrimmage," Dan Gilbert's ready tongue replied.

"So it seems, and— Hello! Jim Hogan and Mike Kinnie, eh? Just the birds we are looking for. We want you on account of that affair down in the Full Hand last night. Lay hold of them, men, and clap on the bracelets."

Being disarmed, and completely "used up," too, the rascals could offer no resistance, and were easily taken.

"What have they been trying to do here?" the sheriff then inquired.

"They have been trying to rule with a high hand," Rainbow Rob answered. "When I first came in, this man"—indicating Hogan—"was about to murder the Spot Saint here, whom the other cut-throat had just knocked down with a treacherous blow from behind; and because I interfered, they both turned upon me and demanded satisfaction. I have been trying to accommodate them."

The sheriff laughed.

"So I should think, judging them by their appearance," he remarked. And then he added, turning to the Spot Saint:

"And what were they going for you for?"

"They wanted satisfaction out of me, too," the Saint answered.

"Satisfaction out of you?" the sheriff repeated: "in what way had you stepped upon their corns?"

"Why, you see I happened into the Full Hand Saloon last night, just about the time the man was shot, and I made an effort to save him from any further attack. I knew nothing about the merits of the quarrel, but my sympathies were all with the fallen man. While I was kneeling beside him, though, this coward thrust his revolver right under my arm and fired another shot into his body."

"That is how it was, eh? I am thinking it will go rough with you, my beauties."

"I hadn't nothin' ter do with th' case," declared Mike Kinnie.

"It was a fair fight," protested Hogan, "an' if I hadn't killed Hoss-thief Hank, he'd 'a' killed me."

"It is a pity you did not succeed in killing each other," the sheriff commented. And then he added, to the crowd:

"They have kept out of sight all day, and I hardly hoped to find them in town. Still, I thought they possibly might be reckless enough to show themselves here, and so I set out with my men to pay the saloons a visit."

"Thanks to you," turning to Rainbow Rob, "the capture was an easy one."

"Here are their weapons," the Spot Saint observed, as he laid them upon a table before the sheriff.

"And here are yours," Alvin Howe supplemented, handing Rainbow Rob his.

"Yes, thanks," Rob acknowledged; "I will put them on."

He did so, and then donned his coat, etc.

The sheriff, at the same time, gathered up the weapons of his two prisoners, as the Saint laid them on the table, and in a few moments was ready to leave the room.

"Come," he said to his deputies, "and we will put these birds in the calaboose. I think they will have to bid adieu to the active world for a time. Too bad, too, for such useful and ornamental citizens will be greatly missed, no doubt. Bring them on, men."

"Don't be too certain whether we'll be missed or not," said Jim Hogan, sullenly. "We may be quite numerous heurabouts—fer some. This heur Spot Saint feller is our game, fer some time; an' you, Texas Tulip, we won't fergit you, you bet!"

They were led away, then, and were soon out of the room, the Spot Saint calling after them as they disappeared:

"Sinners, do repent."

This created a diversion, a roar of laughter followed, and the crowd turned to find new sources of excitement or amusement, or both.

"Purty well done, boyees, purty well done!" exclaimed Dan Gilbert. "Purty well done all around, hang me if it wasn't! Th' way you did git th' drop onto Jim Hogan, Mr. Saint, was beautiful; an' you'd 'a' won th' round, too, if it hadn't been fer that blow from behind."

"An' then you kum in, Mr. Tulip, an' th' way you did wake up things round here was a caution ter tom-cats. You're jest old chain light-in' with yer shooters, you be; an' th' way you kin handle yer dukes, is glorious!"

"It makes me feel proud ter call two such gentlemen my friends; it does, by Satan!"

"I am the friend of any honest man," the Spot Saint declared. "In fact," he added, "I am the friend of every man, honest or otherwise. I am a friend to my enemies. Landlord," turning to Jerry Lynch, "may I trouble you for my carpet-bag again?"

"Here it is, sir," Jerry responded, as he handed it over the bar.

"Thanks for your trouble," said the Saint, as he received it. "The old thing is valuable to me, if to no one else. It contains tracts, you know, and it would not be easy for me to get a new supply of them were I to lose these."

"No, I should reckon not," Dan Gilbert remarked.

"Allow me, friend Gilbert," the Saint observed, as he opened his carpet-bag, "to present you with two or three of them. Take them home and read them. They will do you good. If you are proud to call me your friend, I am proud to give you these."

Dan took them, half reluctantly, and said "Thanks."

"And you," the Saint added, turning to Rainbow Rob, "allow me to offer one to you."

"Thanks," the Tulip said, as he took it. "I will preserve it to remember you by."

"An' so will I," cried Dan, as he stuffed his into his pocket. And then to change the subject, he went on:

"If it hadn't been for Rainbow Rob here, Mr. Spot Saint, I'd 'a' been into that tight, tooth an' nail. An' I'm a reg'lar untamed hyena when I git my feathers on, you bet. Some o' th' boys here think 'cause I'm a little easy with th' old woman, an' do purty much all she asks me ter do, that I've got no sand. That's where they make their grand mistake! I'm all sand! I'm easy with th' old lady 'cause I love her, an' what wouldn't a feller do for the woman he loves?"

"As I was sayin', if it hadn't been fer th' Tulip, I'd 'a' been inter that tight up to my ears. I was jest gettin' th' drop onto Hogan when th' sport appeared, an' as he was direct in line, I was afeerd ter shoot fer fear th' ball might go clean through th' man an' hit him. Only fer that, I'd 'a' bin thar, you kin bet!"

"Yes, you would," sneered a big, red-headed miner, who was half full of fire-water. "We know you of old, Dan Gilbert; you couldn't lick a sick calf."

"Couldn't I?" roared Dan. "If I couldn't git away with them two fellers I'd eat my boots. I tell ye, ye don't know Dan Gilbert. Ye may think ye do, but by Satan ye don't. I'm th' long-clawed, grizzly of th' woolly West, I am, and don't ye fergit it! Whoopee! I'm a howlin' cyclone when I paint my face!" And flourishing his arms wildly the "braying bully," as he was known, "got right up and howled."

All who knew him laughed, of course.

"Ha, ha, ha!" he of the red head roared; "if we don't know ye by this time, Dan, we never will, an' that's th' fact."

"Wal, ye don't then, an' that's th' fact!" cried Dan, growing still more excited. "I once licked four men up in Idaho, an' with one hand tied behind my back at that! Oh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I tell yer it's so! I knocked 'em all stiff, too. Oh! I'm a howlin' hurricane when I git ter goin', an' some o' these days I'll prove it to ye, too! I'm th' untamed hyena. Th' devastatin' whirlwind of th'—"

"Ha, ha, ha! ya-a-a!" the red-head howled.

"An' ter let a squaw git away with ye like you do?" Ha, ha, ha!

"Laugh! laugh if ye want ter! but I tell ye I'm a—"

"Daniel!"

The braying bully was silent at once, and seemed to shrink into himself with fear and conscious insignificance. His face grew pale, his tongue was silenced, his jaw fell, his arms came down, and he trembled in his boots.

Mrs. Dan had appeared.

"DANIEL!" the little woman repeated, still higher and louder, "where are ye? Don't think I didn't hear ye a-blowin', fer I did. I—oh! there ye be, eh?" and in a moment more she stood before him.

"Y—yes, I'm here," Dan falteringly acknowledged.

"I see ye are, Dan'l, I see ye are. An' did ye hear what that red-headed galoot called me?—me your wife?"

"N—no, I—I don't think I did, my dear."

"Well, I did then; he called me a squaw."

"He did?"

"Yes, he did!"

"Wal, y—ye ain't a squaw."

"Then make him take it back. If you've any respect for me, cram it down his throat. Of course I ain't a squaw! an' I want you ter tell him so. Will ye see me insulted like that?"

"You bet I won't!" cried Dan. And then to the red-headed miner he said:

"Mister, I reckon you'll have ter take it back, to save trouble."

"Not much I won't!" the red-head exclaimed.

"I said you 'lowed yer squaw ter rule ye, an' so ye do."

"D'ye hear, 'Dan'l! d'ye hear?" the excited

little woman screamed, catching her liege lord by the sleeve and pulling him toward the miner. "D'ye hear what he's called me again? Now you jest go for him, or I'll go for you."

The miner had dropped his hand upon a revolver, and stood defiant.

Mr. Gilbert hesitated.

"D'ye hear?" the little woman demanded. "I want ye ter make him take it back! He's insulted yer wife! Ain't ye mean enough ter resent it?—you, th' long-clawed grizzly, th' untamed hyena!"

Dan was desperate and reached for a weapon, but the miner was too quick for him.

"Hold on!" he exclaimed, "it won't be healthy fer ye ter draw, Dan'l!"

"See how 'tis, don't ye," said Dan, to his better (a great deal better) half; "he's got th' bulge."

"Yes, I see he has," in a sneering tone. "Anybody kin git th' bulge on you, an' anybody kin insult yer wife. If you was only half th' man you claim to be, you'd 'a' had th' drop on him th' instant th' word of insult left his mouth. You're a coward, Dan Gilbert, an' that's all ye are!"

"What?" Dan cried, "you call me that? D'ye want me ter knock yer head off?" and he raised his hand.

"Yes, I call ye that," the little woman affirmed; and as she spoke she stepped up close to him, put her arms akimbo, and looked up at him defiantly. "And now go ahead and knock my head off," she added.

Dan "took water."

"Come," he said, "let's go home."

"Yes, let's go," Mrs. Dan agreed; but at the same instant she whipped a revolver out from under her apron and turned upon the red-headed miner, getting the "drop" on him beautifully, at the same time adding: "But we won't go till this galoot has taken back what he said."

"Now," she ordered, "you take it back, you red-headed quartz-driller, or I'll drill you!"

And there was a dangerous gleam in her mild eyes.

It was a bitter pill for the fellow to swallow, but he was in a bad corner and could not well escape; and this being the case, he thrust his revolver back into his belt, lifted his hat with mock politeness, and said:

"I make it a p'int never ter refuse a lady, ma'm, an' ter you I 'pollygize. You ain't no squaw; you're a chief."

CHAPTER XVIII.

BEN DOWN TAKEN DOWN.

THE perfect howl of laughter that followed, fairly caused the building to tremble.

"Three yawps fer Mrs. Dan!" cried some one. And three cheers were given with a will.

Mrs. Gilbert blushed, bowed, and smiled profusely.

"Thank ye," she said, "thank ye kindly. I hope I don't seem bold; but when I have ter stand up fer myself, I'm goin' ter do it."

"Come, now, Dan'l, let's go home. This is no place fer you."

She still held her revolver in hand, and "Dan'l" had little choice in the matter.

"All right," he assented, with seeming willingness, "let's go. Ye see, boys, when a feller's got a plucky little woman like mine, an' he loves her like I do, he'll do a'most anything she says. Come on, little chief."

"That's what I said, 'come on,'" Mrs. Gilbert repeated, and she led the "devastatin' cyclone" away in triumph.

As soon as they were gone, the red-headed miner broke out again.

"It's all well enough," he said, "ter be per-lite to th' shemale kind, an' do as they request; but you kin bet high that no woman kin ever handle me like that one handles Dan Gilbert!"

"You would not allow it, eh?" the Spot Saint inquired.

"Allow it? Never! Why, Dan is just afeerd ter say 'beans.'"

"So it seems."

"And if you were in his place," remarked Rainbow Rob, "I venture to say you would do very much the same as he does."

"Would I? Well now, young stranger, don't you fool yourself. I've got a wife an' fambly, same as Dan has, but you'll never hear tell o' Ben Down's bein' follered around an' walked off home. Oh! I reckon not!"

"Then it is clear that Mrs. Down has not the nerve Mrs. Gilbert has. She, I want to tell you, has some 'sand' in her."

"Sand or no sand, she couldn't boss me."

"She took an apology out of you in a most business-like way, I noticed."

"Thunder! didn't I 'splain why I guv in? Didn't I say I make it a p'int never ter refuse shemales?"

"Yes, so you said, and Dan's excuse is about the same; but don't you suppose we could all see through it? Ha, ha, ha! I know it is a bitter pill, but you take my word for it, that woman has got nerve enough to rule this whole town."

"Why, confound it, young stranger, you seem ter talk as though I am afeerd of her!"

"It looked very much that way, I assure you."

"It did indeed," the Spot Saint confirmed.

"Why, great snakes, feller-pardners, you're away off! I could 'a' turned th' vantage in no time, if I'd wanted ter, an' made her sick o' drawin' a pop on me. You really don't s'pose she made me 'pollygize, do ye?"

"Well," answered Rainbow Rob, "if I must give you my honest opinion of it, Mr. Down, I must say that I do so suppose."

"Wal, if I'd 'a' knowed that *that* was th' idee my action would give, you kin bet I wouldn't offer'd no 'pollygy, woman or no woman! It's too late now, though. If it should ever happen ag'in, which ain't likely, you bet I'll show ye how it stands, an' how it don't!"

For quite a time this, and the other events of the evening were discussed, until they lost interest or were exhausted, and in the mean time the saloon had settled down to its normal state, all the excitement being over.

"Innocent amusement, gentlemen," the Spot Saint from Scarecrow remarked, after watching the players at one of the pool tables for a considerable while, "is good for the mind, and what is good for the mind is good for the body; and anything that is good for the mind and body cannot be hurtful to the soul. Hence, if any one present would like to play a game or two of pool with me, let him say so."

"I'm your man, sir," announced Rainbow Rob, who happened to be standing near by, in company with Alvin Howe.

"All right, young man," the Spot Saint agreed, "we'll try it."

The players they had been watching had just given up their table, and the Spot Saint, taking up a cue, secured it for himself.

Rainbow Rob selected a cue, and then the game opened by the Spot Saint's "breaking" and running a score of six balls.

"I guess I shall not have to give you any points, my friend," the Tulip remarked.

"It is some years since I have handled a cue," the Spot Saint responded, "and I have lost my grip a little."

"You must be an interesting player when you are on your muscle, then."

The Spot Saint smiled.

A peculiar character the Spot Saint was, certainly. He still wore his long, black and tattered coat buttoned up close to his chin; his hat had its same crushed-down appearance; his boots gaped as widely as ever; and he still looked clerical. Sized up as a whole, however, we cannot recall our former statement that he had more the appearance of a "hard case."

He was something of a mystery—or at least that was what Rainbow Rob thought, and he meant to know more concerning him, if possible to learn it.

The young man's thoughts, though, did not interfere with his playing, and as soon as the Spot Saint missed he took hold.

The balls were left in a very awkward position for him to start in, but after examining their positions for a moment, he ventured upon his first shot.

And that shot was the wonder of the evening.

Instead of shooting at the balls directly, he sent the white flying up to the opposite end of the table, where it struck the cushion and then rebounded toward the balls it was intended for.

These balls, two in number, lay in such a position that no other shot could have pocketed either of them, and even an expert player would have found it necessary to exert his skill in shooting from that side.

And that first shot proved Rainbow Rob an expert player.

He not only pocketed one of the two, but *both* of them.

That shot met with loud applause, and following it up, the balls now being in good position, the Tulip from Texas easily ran "pool."

In a few minutes this table was the center of attraction of the whole room, and for an hour or more the patrons of the Green Bottle witnessed pool-playing such as few of them had ever seen before.

Both Rainbow Rob and the Spot Saint were good players, and although the Tulip carried off the honors, the Saint was not greatly distanced. Both made some extra good shots, and both, of course, missed some that the veriest amateur would have blushed to miss—as is usually the way.

This event of the evening is mentioned "by the way," in order to lead up to the hour of a little "scene" that followed.

And that scene was one in which Ben Down figured, much to his surprise.

About the time when the interesting pool-playing ceased, who should enter the saloon but Mrs. Dan Gilbert.

The meek-looking and mild-eyed little woman seemed greatly excited.

"Is Mr. Down here?" she inquired, speaking loud enough for all present to hear.

Ben Down grew red at once, as his mind reverted to the other scene in which he and this little woman had played the leading roles.

"Yes," he answered, roughly; "he's here. What d'ye want o' him?"

"May I speak with ye fer a minute in private?" Mrs. Gilbert requested.

"Naw, ye can't," was the reply. "If ye've got anything ter say ter me, out with it."

Ben felt that the public eye was upon him now, and wanted to recover the ground he had lost in the other encounter.

"Well," said the little woman, "your wife is very ill, an' she wants ye ter come home right away."

Now, had Ben acted in a sensible manner, and as he certainly would have acted had any one other than Mrs. Dan Gilbert brought him the same information, he would have started for home at once; but he did not do so.

He felt that he must show that he was master of his own actions, and that neither his wife nor Mrs. Gilbert, nor both of them, could hasten his movements.

Under the circumstances, nothing was expected of him by any one present but quick and prompt obedience to the call.

This was a case in which his former "hitch up" had nothing to do, and had no influence—or should not have had, at least.

But Ben was not prompt to obey.

"All right, Mrs. Gilbert," he said, "I'll be there in a little while."

"No, you must come at once, indeed you must," the little woman insisted, but without any accent of command. Her tone was entirely one of entreaty.

"I'll go when I get ready," Ben growled. "You don't want ter think ye've got Dan Gilbert ter deal with now, an' kin boss me around as ye do him, fer ye can't do it! I'll go home when I get ready."

Mrs. Gilbert's face flushed, and a new light gleamed in her eyes.

"Nobody is tryin' ter boss ye 'round," she said. "I've merely done my duty, and more, in comin' here fer ye at this late hour; an' now if ye ain't man enough ter come, ye kin stay." And she turned and started for the door.

"See that?" Ben chuckled, "see how she dropped me? Now if that had 'a' been poor Dan, she'd a-waltzed him out o' here in no time. No, sir-ee," as Mrs. Gilbert disappeared, "no blamed squaw kin run me, an' don't ye furgit it!"

Hearing her husband's name spoken just as she passed out, Mrs. Gilbert stopped just outside the door and listened. And then she heard the word "squaw" used again, and her blood fairly boiled.

In an instant she resolved to take Ben Down home.

She was no stranger to the Green Bottle, as she assisted in cleaning the saloon every week, and at once made her way around to the rear and entered again by way of a back door.

Some few noticed her, but she quickly motioned them to say nothing, and then advanced swiftly and silently toward where Ben Down was standing.

"No, sir-ee!" Ben was just explaining, "no petticoat rule for me. An' if Dan would learn that squaw of his'n her place, she'd—"

"Now you shut right up, Ben Down, you great, big fool you, an' march fer home. If ye don't I'll fix ye so's ye'll have ter be carried there. You've called—Hold on! don't make no move ter draw! If ye do I'll drop ye dead. I mean biz, now, an' you want ter mosey fer home. Now, start!"

This was the climax-capping event of the whole evening.

There stood the little woman, with a cocked revolver aimed straight at Ben Down's head, and he was helpless.

He stormed, and blustered, and raved and swore, but all to no purpose. The little woman had him, and had him tight. And at last she said:

"Now, Ben Down, we'll go. You're makin' me nervous, an' my finger is just as likely ter twitch an' pull this trigger as not. I mean biz, now, an' if ye don't start off I'll shoot. Now, start!"

It was the big uncompromising revolver that did the business, and, completely cowed, but not silenced, the red-headed miner started, amid the delirious hooting and yelling of the fun-loving crowd.

CHAPTER XIX. IN WORDS OF FIRE.

Two hours after midnight.

Silver Nugget, the little city so busy and bustling in the daytime, was now silent.

Scarcely a sound was to be heard, and few persons were abroad.

Here and there, occasionally, a night watchman was to be seen, slowly going his rounds, who might meet another of his kind at some corner and pause for a few minutes' chat; but scarcely any one else.

Few lights were to be seen, and the streets were cloaked in darkness.

About the hour named, after the watchman had passed up the main street and beyond the post-office, a dark form came along from the direction of the hotel corner, keeping close to the buildings, and advanced to the door of the post-office.

It was a man; but who that man was, no one, in the darkness, could have told.

Stopping at the door of the post-office, and

keeping close within the doorway, the first thing he did was to draw a large envelope from an inner pocket and drop it into the box.

This done, he next produced a bottle and a small brush.

Had any one been watching his movements, that person might well have wondered what he intended to do now.

And that person would have wondered in vain, for the man's intentions could not have been guessed, or anticipated.

Opening the bottle, taking the cork out with his teeth and holding it thus, he dipped the brush into the liquid it contained, and then reaching up, began to paint upon the door.

Rapidly and freely his hand moved, tracing characters it would seem, and for several minutes he was thus employed.

Finally his task was done, and putting the stopper in the bottle again, and returning bottle and brush to his pocket, he glided away as cautiously as he had come.

What had he been doing?

A chance observer might well have asked the question.

Had he, the observer, stood and watched the post-office door for a short time, all would have been made plain.

Not long had the mysterious man been gone, when peculiar little spots and lines began to appear upon the door, glowing faintly.

Minute after minute these spots and lines increased in number and in brightness, until they began to form themselves into letters and words.

The man had been painting with luminous paint!

When the watchman made his next round his attention was drawn to the door of the post-office by his catching a glimpse of something bright as he was passing, on the opposite side of the street, and looking quickly across he saw what he at first feared was the beginning of a fire.

A second glance, however, told him that it was not fire, and he crossed the street to investigate.

Judge of his surprise when, on reaching the opposite sidewalk, he betold upon the door of the post-office, in words of fire, the following:

"NOTICE!"

"There is a letter in this office, addressed to SAMUEL DUNTON, Esq. Any person knowing the man, will please notify him. The letter is important."

There was no signature.

"Mighty queer I didn't see that afore," the watchman mused as he read. "I'll bet it wasn't there when I went up th' street, fer if it had been I couldn't 'a' helped noticin' it. Wonder how it kem there? If it is old man Madison's work, he's got a new style, that is sure."

Stepping up to the door, the man put his finger upon one of the letters and found that the paint was fresh.

"Yes, sir," he cogitated, "this has been put on inside o' half an hour, that is pop sure. It wasn't on when I went up, an' that is less'n a half hour ago. Shouldn't wonder if there was a little mystery here o' some sort. Hope I meet Joe at th' corner, an' if I do I'll fetch him here ter see it."

The watchman went on then, and, as he had wished, met "Joe," another of the night-watch force, at the corner.

"Joe," he said, "there's a mystery up th' street here."

"A mystery?" quoth Joe.

"Yes, a mystery."

"What is it?"

"Th' devil has been writin' on th' door of th' post-office. Come an' see it."

"You're foolin'."

"Nary. Jest come an' see fer yerself. Besides, I want *proof* ter what I've seen, so if it ain't there in th' mornin' I kin tell my story."

"All right, le's go an' see it, then."

They went up as far as the post-office, and the mysterious notice was still there.

If anything, the phosphoric paint was glowing even brighter than ever.

"There it is," said the discoverer, "an' now, what d'ye think of it?"

"Loomerous paint," Joe announced at once.

"What d'ye call it?"

"Loomerous paint. Paint that kin be seen in th' dark."

"Oh! I see. But, how did it come there?"

"Put there, in course. Th' postmaster must have a new idee. Must be tryin' to show us what he kin do."

"Postmaster be darn! He didn't put it thar!"

"He didn't! How d'ye know he didn't? If he didn't, then who did?"

"Give it up. It ain't likely, though, that th' old man would git up at two o'clock in th' mornin' ter paint a sign, is it?"

"Wal, no, not egzakly, I should say."

"So I opine; an' this notice heur ain't been painted more'n half an hour at th' most."

"That is sing'lar, I swow."

"That's jest th' fact of it."

"How d'ye know it, though?"

"Wal, in th' fu'st place th' paint is wet; an' in th' next place, that notice wasn't there half an hour ago when I went up th' street."

"Mebby it was, an' you didn't see it."
 "Nixey. If it had been thar then I'd 'a' seen it, jest th' same as I did whin I kem down th' street."

"Wai, I reckon you're right. It is a sort o' queerness, hang me if it ain't."
 The two dismissed the matter for some minutes, and then concluded that it did not concern them much anyhow, and returned to their duty.

Some hours later, when the town awoke to the business of another day, that notice upon the door of the post-office was seen in letters of the deepest black.

It was early discovered, the old postmaster was soon made aware of it, the story of the night watchman was not long in getting around, and that notice upon the door became the talk and wonder of the town.

All the forenoon crowds stood and gazed at it, and there was one question that the postmaster and his daughter answered a hundred times at least.

And that question was this:

"Is there such a letter in the office?"

And the answer was the same to one and all, thus:

"There is."

Yes, such a letter was there, as the reader is aware.

In the course of the forenoon Judge Lawrence called at the office, and the postmaster invited him to step around behind the counter and into the office proper.

"You saw that notice on the door, I suppose?" he queried.

"Yes," the judge answered, "and I have heard the peculiar story the night watchmen tell about it. Is there such a letter here?"

"There is. And that is not all."

"Not all?"

"No."

"What more is there to it?"

"You recollect the two mysterious notes we received, do you not?"

"Certainly."

"Well, this letter for Samuel Dunton is a copy of the same notice, or I am much mistaken."

"Ha! is that so?"

"It is."

"What gives you the impression it is so?"

"Why, the envelope is the same size and kind, and the writing is in the same hand. Here it is, see for yourself."

As he spoke, Mr. Madison took the letter from its proper box and put it into the judge's hand.

"You are right," the judge declared, as he examined it, "it is the same. How did it come here?"

"It was dropped into the door-box some time during the night."

"By the same one who painted the notice on the door, of course."

"Yes, that seems reasonable to suppose."

"I tell you, Henry, there is a great deal to this old story. A great deal more than we are aware of."

"I believe you are right. And I wonder who this Samuel Dunton can be?"

"Hard to tell."

"We shall learn when he calls, of course."

"Yes, if he *does* call."

"You think he won't?"

"He may be dead. My opinion is that the man who left the letter and painted the notice on the door has been searching for him, but has not been able to find him, and that this is almost his last resort."

"I believe you are right. You see, that notice, written in letters of fire, as it were, is bound to be talked about, and if Samuel Dunton is anywhere in this part of the country, he is bound to learn, sooner or later, that a letter is here for him."

"That is the way I look at it. Will you allow the notice to remain on the door?"

"Yes, I shall leave it there just as it is. It is in no one's way, does harm to no one, and as Samuel Dunton is no doubt one of the favored 'eight,' and evidently can claim some degree of relationship to me, I should be willing to lend what aid I can to the man who is searching for him."

"Right enough, I venture to agree. Do you not think it a little strange, by the way, that this person acts so secretly?"

"Well, yes, it does seem strange. I suppose he has his reasons for it, however, and knows what he is about."

"Yes; I suppose so. At any rate, we must give him credit to that extent."

Just then their daughters, Claudia Madison, and Lulu Lawrence, came in.

"Oh! here you are, papa," exclaimed Lulu.

"I have been looking for you."

"And what do you want? Some favor, James, I'll be bound!" turning to the postmaster.

"No doubt—no doubt," was the ready answer.

"Yes, it is a favor, of course," Lulu owned. "Claudia and I want to go for a ride, and I have been looking for you to ask if we may have our favorite horses."

"Ha, ha, ha! Just what I expected. Yes, take them, but do not go too far."

"No, we shall not go far."

"And you are willing, papa?" asked the fair Claudia, turning to Mr. Madison.

"Yes, yes; only be careful."

With laughter and thanks the two hurried away to order the horses got ready.

CHAPTER XX.

SULPHUR SAM'S DEMAND.

LULU LAWRENCE and Claudia Madison were firm friends, and the belles of Silver Nugget, Lulu holding first place, as we have explained.

They often went riding together, for pleasure and exercise, and both were excellent riders. They rode with ease and grace, and managed their horses like true equestrian queens.

And of no prettier sight could Silver Nugget boast than was presented by these two girls when they dashed away down the Old Trail upon their spirited horses.

On this occasion, when they left the post-office they went at once to the Lawrence residence, where Lulu immediately telephoned to the stables for the horses to be saddled and brought around.

In a short time they were at the door, and then the girls mounted and were off like the wind.

"Where shall we go?" asked Lulu, as they left the town behind them and the Old Trail ceased to be a street and became a trail in fact.

"Oh! I do not care," answered Claudia; "anywhere."

"We were cautioned not to go far, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!" Claudia laughed musically, "so we always are."

"And we are so good to obey."

"On, yes!"

And then they both laughed.

Evidently such parental mandates did not rest very heavily upon them.

"Suppose we ride over to Bonanza and back."

"Oh! will that not be really too far?"

"Why, no. It is early, and such a beautiful day; it will be just delightful."

"Well, just as you say. If you are not afraid there is no reason why I should be."

"Afraid! What is there to be afraid of?"

"You forget that dreadful road-agent, do you not?"

"Pshaw! do you suppose I am afraid of him? I have nothing he can take, except a ring or two, and I guess he would not murder us."

"He might capture us, though."

"Well, I should like to see him do it. If his horse can outrun ours, it is a good one. If you are really afraid, though, we will not go."

"No, no, I am not afraid, only I thought it would be well not to go quite so far."

"Well, we won't then. We will go half-way, and then return."

"All right. And now—away!"

Both touched their horses lightly with their whips, having reduced their speed to a walk while talking, and away they went at a rapid, graceful canter.

Bonanza, the place which Lulu Lawrence proposed as their objective point, was a young town about twelve miles from Silver Nugget, and the trail led through one of the wildest parts of the country.

There were few camps between the two places and none on the direct trail.

About half-way to Bonanza the trail led through a deep, and almost perfectly dark canyon.

And it was to this point that the two girls decided to go; that is, to the entrance to the canyon, and there turn and start back again.

On they rode, chatting merrily, and the rich blood of perfect health mounted to their cheeks as they drank in the pure mountain air.

"Some one has been this way before us this morning," Lulu remarked, when they had turned off from the Old Trail and entered upon the one leading to Bonanza.

"Is that so?" Claudia queried, in response to the remark.

"Yes; see there, and there."

"Sure enough."

"Wonder who it has been."

"That is useless. Some one going to Bonanza, though, no doubt."

"Yes, that is pretty certain. It is nothing to us, however."

On they went, and in due time arrived at the place they had decided upon as their turning point.

At the entrance to the canyon they stopped, and then allowed their horses to rest while they enjoyed for a few minutes the beautiful scenery.

Five minutes, perhaps, they stood there, and then they turned to start for home.

Judge of their surprise, then, to learn that they were not alone.

There before them, as they turned, they beheld a masked horseman. He was clad in black from head to foot, and his horse was of the same color. It was, in fact, Sulphur Sam, the road-agent.

"Do not be alarmed, ladies," he said, lifting his hat, "I intend no harm to you."

"Then let us pass at once, sir, if you please," Lulu demanded spiritedly.

"Yes, yes, in a moment. I see such pretty faces so seldom, that it is not easy to deny myself the enjoyment of feasting my eyes when the opportunity offers."

"Sir! you insult us!" cried Claudia.

"I am sure I have no intention of doing so. Is it an insult to tell you that you are pretty, when I speak but the truth?"

"We do not wish to discuss the matter, sir," answered Lulu. "Please allow us to pass, and at once."

"You shall go presently. Pray do not deny me a few minutes of the pleasure of your company. May I inquire where you reside?"

"We reside at Silver Nugget," replied Claudia, "and we desire to return there immediately."

"Silver Nugget, eh? I was there the other night, and again yesterday. Quite a charming little city. It has many attractions."

"Yes, we have heard about your being there," remarked Lulu.

"Indeed!"

"Oh, yes!" Claudia confirmed.

"Then no doubt you are aware who I am."

"I think we are," Lulu returned.

"And who am I?"

"Are you not Sulphur Sam?"

"Under the circumstances, ladies, I can see no reason why I should not own that I am."

"Then you are detaining us for the purpose of robbing us, no doubt," commented Claudia.

"You are wrong!" the road-agent exclaimed. "I have no such intention. I have told you that I intend no harm to you."

"Then why do you not allow us to go on at once?" Lulu complained.

"Bless me, how unreasonable you are!" Sulphur Sam exclaimed. "All I ask is a few moments of your time and company, that I may admire you, and you are not willing to grant even so slight a favor."

"You have detained me several minutes already, sir," Lulu urged.

"But very unsatisfactory ones, since you have been persistently demanding release."

"What, then, would you have?" Claudia interrogated.

"I do not ask much. Change the subject, let me enjoy the pleasure of your society for ten minutes, and you shall pass."

"And if we refuse?"

"Let us not consider that."

"Why not?"

"Because the terms I offer are so liberal and reasonable, that you surely will not refuse them, and force me to other measures less agreeable to you."

"We do refuse, sir, and flatly, to hold any further conversation with you whatever!" cried Lulu, indignantly. "And now we insist upon your allowing us to pass at once!"

"Ha! ha! ha! Beautiful! beautiful! Charming!" the road-agent exclaimed. "What a fiery spirit you have! I admire you, I must confess."

"You had better allow us to go, and that immediately," Claudia warned.

"Pretty, pretty!" the outlaw cried. "I scarcely know which of you is the more beautiful. Such spirit! Such flashing eyes!"

The place where the three stood was at the entrance to the deep, dark canyon we have mentioned, and there the trail was narrow, and enclosed on both sides by rugged, rocky walls.

The only chance the maidens had for escape in the direction they desired to go, was the possible one of a sudden dash forward, one on each side of the horseman who blocked their way.

And they both seemed to recognize this chance at the same moment.

With a quick, meaning glance at each other they touched their horses, and the noble animals, as though perfectly understanding what was required of them, bounded forward instantly.

But the attempt was not successful. With a quick motion Sulphur Sam turned his horse across the narrow trail, thus blocking the way for Claudia completely, and at the same time he caught Lulu's horse by the bridle.

"Not so fast, my beauties, not so fast!" he exclaimed. "Do not imagine that you can escape from Sulphur Sam so easily. How foolish you are! to make all this annoyance for yourselves, when the terms I extend are so easy."

"Take your hand off that bridle, you wretch!" cried Lulu, in an imperious tone. And as she uttered the command she flashed forth a tiny revolver from the pocket of her dress.

Instantly Sulphur Sam's gaze was turned toward the canyon, and taken off her guard for the instant, Lulu looked in that direction.

The next instant, with a quick motion, Sulphur Sam snatched her weapon from her hand.

He had played a clever trick—the trick which, though old, is ever new.

"Ha, ha, ha!" he laughed. "Don't you begin to realize the sort of man I am? When all the sheriffs of Colorado and all their deputies have failed to get away with Sulphur Sam, don't imagine that he will allow a woman to do it. Oh, no!"

So disappointed were the two girls, and so vexed, that they were ready to cry.

"If you, too, are armed," the outlaw said, turning toward Claudia, "pray do not attempt to use your weapon. If you do, you will force

me to harsher measures than I desire to take against you."

"Please let us go," Claudia implored, as she realized how helpless they were in his power. "I am sure it can be no pleasure to you to worry and frighten us as you are doing."

"You are right. It is no pleasure to me, and I am sorry you have brought it about. Had you complied with my simple request, and honored me by granting what I asked, you would have by this time been free. Now you will have to buy our liberty at a dearer price."

"Buy our liberty?"

"A dearer price?"

"Exactly so."

The two girls looked at each other, with their terror plainly written upon their faces.

"Oh, do not be greatly alarmed, ladies," the rascal said, with a laugh; "the price I demand is one you can easily pay. A kiss from each of you, and you shall be free."

At that instant another actor appeared upon the scene, and a ringing voice commanded:

"Hands up, you dog! or you are a dead man!"

CHAPTER XXI.

RAINBOW ROB AND LULU.

It was a surprise for all three, for none of them had heard a sound before the ringing words were uttered.

But Sulphur Sam did not obey the order.

He well knew what capture meant for him.

Instead, he put spurs to his horse, without even looking around, and placing himself directly in line with the two young ladies, leaned forward low upon his horse and bounded away into the canyon, sending back a mocking, defiant laugh as he disappeared from sight.

Two or three shots were fired after him by the man who had appeared upon the scene so opportunely, but without effect, owing to the surprise at his sudden move, perhaps, and certainly owing to the fact that the two girls were directly in the way and in danger of being hit.

And this man, who was he?

At his first words, the two girls, glancing instantly in the direction whence they came, beheld, standing in the middle of the trail, a short distance away, a handsome young man of noble presence.

He was clad in a suit of dark-blue corduroy, wore a shapely white hat, and— But why delay? He it was: Rainbow Rob, the Tulip from Texas.

Thrusting his revolvers back into their places in his invisible belt as soon as Sulphur Sam was out of sight, he raised his hat politely, saying:

"I am proud, ladies, to have been of service to you."

"And we can never thank you enough, sir, for the great service you have rendered us," responded Lulu, as she rode forward and extended her hand.

"I am more than thanked already," Rob rejoined, as he took the proffered hand and touched his lips to the dainty fingers.

Miss Lulu felt her pulses quicken at the touch; and the warm blood mounted to her cheeks, making them blush like roses.

Claudia, too, rode forward and offered her hand, at the same time thanking their hero for his timely interference.

Rob accepted her hand and made a clever response, but did not bestow the same favor he had shown to Lulu.

He knew very well who the girls were, and had learned that his friend, Alvin Howe, was Claudia's accepted lover; and for this reason, if for no other, he omitted the caress—if so it may be termed.

"Have I not seen you at Silver Nugget?" inquired Lulu.

"It is very likely," Rob answered. "I am sure I have seen you there, and your friend, too."

"Yes, my home is there, and so is hers. You are a stranger there, are you not?"

"Yes, comparatively so. But, may I inquire which way you are going?"

"We shall return home at once. We came out for a ride, and were just about starting back when we were stopped by that rascally road-agent."

"Then I would advise you to start on at once. There is no telling what new work that fellow may be up to. He bears a hard reputation."

"Perhaps you are right."

"I know that I am."

"And which way are you going, sir, if we may ask?"

"I shall return to the town at once."

"How fortunate!"

"Why?"

"Because you can bear us company."

"I should be delighted to do so, but unfortunately I have no horse. I am out on foot."

"No matter, we will walk our horses all the way, and you can easily keep pace with us. Pray do not think me selfish," it was Lulu speaking, "but that fellow disarmed me, and now we are positively afraid. Is it not so, Claudia?"

The little postmistress assented that such was the fact.

"I shall be more than pleased to have the

honor of your company, said Rob," "and if I can be of any further service to you, you have but to command me. Let us go."

The trio started, then, Claudia ahead, and Lulu following with Rob walking at her side.

A blind man could have told where the Tulip's preference lay.

"Am I right in guessing that you are Miss Lulu Lawrence?" Rob presently questioned.

"You are," was the reply; "I am she."

"And your friend is Miss Madison, whom I have seen at the post-office?"

"Yes."

"So I thought."

"You have seen us before, then?"

"Yes. I have seen Miss Madison at the post-office, as I said, and you were pointed out to me yesterday afternoon."

"And may I inquire your name?"

"My name is Robert Ransom."

"Oh, indeed! Then you are the one I have heard spoken of as 'Rainbow Rob,' are you not?"

"So I am sometimes called."

"What a funny name! Why are you so called?"

"It is owing to my partiality for bright-colored neck-ties, such as I now wear."

"True enough! the one you have on is just like a rainbow."

"Yes, it is an imitation."

"What funny names people do get here in the West, as a rule."

"Very true."

"There was one I heard papa speak of yesterday, that I thought was particularly odd. I do not remember it now, clearly, but I think it was 'Spotted Scarecrow,' or something like that."

Rob laughed.

"You evidently mean the 'Spot Saint from Scarecrow,'" he said.

"Oh, yes! that was it. What a peculiar name it is!"

"It is, indeed; and the man is just as peculiar as his name."

"So? In what way is he so peculiar?"

Rob then went on to tell of some of the Spot Saint's queer sayings and doings, at which the two girls were greatly amused.

"Whenever you tire of my company, ladies," the sport presently said, "you are at liberty to gallop away and leave me. This is but a sorry pace for you, upon such spirited animals."

"That would show how grateful we are for the service you have rendered us, indeed! But, you need have no fear of our wearying of your company so long as you are pleased to talk."

"Thanks. I shall continue to talk, then, you may be sure. I am afraid, however, it will not take long to make you tired of listening."

"Not while you interest and amuse us as you have been doing."

"Very well, then, I shall exert myself to the utmost."

And he did.

He was an excellent talker, and he spared no pains to make himself agreeable, especially to Lulu.

Not that he slighted Claudia in any degree, for he did not, except in walking beside Lulu all the way; but it was Lulu's eyes that met his own as he talked, and it was she who tried most to keep the conversation from flagging.

The distance, especially to Lulu, had never seemed so short before, and before she could hardly realize it they were entering the town.

"What!" she exclaimed, "are we here so soon?"

"What a short way it has seemed!" echoed Claudia.

"Which speaks well for the way you have entertained us, sir," Lulu added, with a smile, to Rob.

"I appreciate the compliment, ladies," Rob responded, "and sincerely hope that I may some time have the pleasure of trying to entertain you again. I trust, however, that you will have no further need of my services to rescue you from road-agents and the like."

"And so do we!" they both exclaimed at once.

"We shall take care not to venture so far from town again," Lulu added.

Before they had gone far, after entering the outskirts of the town, they met no less a personage than Judge Lawrence.

The judge had been over to a mine in that direction, and was just coming out upon the Old Trail from a by-path as the three came along.

"Why, here is papa!" Lulu exclaimed, as she drew rein.

The judge advanced toward them at once, with a questioning glance toward Rainbow Rob.

"This gentleman, papa," said Lulu, "is Mr. Robert Ransom, to whom Claudia and I are greatly indebted for his having rescued us from a terrible dilemma a short time ago."

"Indeed! Mr. Ransom, allow me to take your hand, and to thank you. If my daughter is indebted to you, sir, so am I."

Rob gave his hand, responding:

"The debt is more than canceled, sir, for the pleasure of being of service to the ladies amply rewarded me. Pray do not speak of it."

"I shall speak of it, sir, and I thank you most

sincerely. But, Lulu, what was your 'terrible dilemma'?"

"Why, we were captured by that horrible road-agent, Sulphur Sam, and he was worrying and insulting us outrageously when Mr. Ransom appeared on the scene and put him to flight."

"By heavens! but this is a greater service than I could have dreamed of! Young man, allow me to thank you again; and if there is anything I can do for you, you have but to command me."

"Thank you, sir, but I am more than rewarded already. Besides, no man should expect reward for doing no more than his duty."

"Well, well, have it as you will; but please count me as your friend."

"That, sir, I am proud to have the privilege to do. Are you going into town?"

"Yes."

"Then I will walk with you, with your permission, for I can see that the ladies' horses are impatient to be off at a livelier pace than a walk."

"Certainly, certainly, I shall be glad to have you do so."

"And, papa," said Lulu, "you must ask Mr. Ransom to call on us."

Then, with a nod and a smile from each, the two girls touched their horses and were away like the wind.

"Allow me," said Judge Lawrence, then, as he and Rainbow Rob started up the street, "to comply with my daughter's request and ask you to call upon me at my house. I shall be glad to have you do so."

"And I shall be pleased to avail myself of the invitation."

"You put that road-agent to flight, my daughter said. A pity you did not capture him."

"It was impossible to do so, under the circumstances. He sought safety in flight, and instantly placed the ladies between himself and me. I could do nothing."

"You did sufficiently, however, in putting him to flight and rescuing the girls. I shall not forget the service. I would like to see him captured."

"As I think you will, sir. Such men come to grief sooner or later."

Quite some conversation followed, during the walk into town, and when the two men parted, Rainbow Rob had made quite a favorable impression upon the judge.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE MYSTERIOUS LETTER.

WHEN the shades of evening began to fall over Silver Nugget, a crowd began to collect in front of the post-office.

People were attracted there by the two watchmen's story of the mysterious notice upon the door—the story that at night the words stood stolid forth in letters of fire.

Few doubted the story, but all wanted to see for themselves.

Long before it were possible for the effects of the "looming" paint to be noticed, people began to congregate there, and presently something gave them cause for much merriment.

It took but a glance to learn what that something was.

There on the door, just under the painted notice, some one had pinned a large piece of paper, bearing another notice of similar import.

It took but a glance at it to take in its wording, and all who read it appreciated the joke instantly.

The paper contained these words, thus rudely printed:

"NOTICE.

"There is a letter in this office for a galoot called ELEAZER BROWN. ANY PERSON KNOWN HIM, PLEASE TELL HIM OF THIS FACT. THE LETTER IS IMPORTANT."

Poor Eleazer! His friends were not happy, it seemed, unless they were in some way or another trying to get a little fun out of him.

Eleazer, as we have said, visited the post-office every night of the week except Sunday night, and almost every night he received a letter.

And his friends rightly guessed that nine times out of ten the letter was from Tryphena Marks.

His regularity in calling at the office was well known, and now this notice was put up by some one of his mine companions, to create a little fun at his expense.

The mail had recently arrived, and in a few minutes Eleazer was seen coming down the street.

He always waited until the mail had arrived, in order to give the impression that his letters came with it, and were not drop-letters, as his friends supposed.

When he reached the office he wondered a little why such a crowd was there, but when he turned to enter, and saw the notice, he saw it all.

For the first time, almost, he showed signs of anger.

This, he thought, was carrying a poor joke just a little too far.

With flushing face he rushed up the steps and tore the offending notice down with one spiteful jerk, and then turning to the crowd, exclaimed: "Some folks is too mighty smart ter live long! It'll be a rich joke on th' feller that stuck this up, if there *ain't* a letter here fer me; an' I hope to th' Lord ther' *ain't*!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the crowd, and a voice shouted:

"Oh! but there is one thar, Ele, as you kin safely gamble!"

And the crowd laughed again.

Eleazer tore the notice into bits and cast them to the wind, and then entered the office.

"Hello! here comes Eleazer, right on time!" was his greeting within.

This was from the one who had put the notice up. And he added:

"I told th' boys, when I see'd that ar' notice on th' door: 'Boys,' sez I, 'ye needn't trouble yerselves ter put up a notice fer Eleazer. He's bound ter be here, rain or shine.'"

"Oh, yes, I'm allus on hand!" Eleazer answered, with an attempt at a smile.

"An' d'ye reckon she's writ ag'in so soon?"

"Shouldn't wonder a bit. She's awful fond o' me, is that sister o' mine."

"Sister! Ha, ha, ha! That's th' fu'st time we ever knowed Tryfeener was yer sister."

"Tryphena be darn!" cried Eleazer. "I ain't talkin' bout her!"

"Ho, ho, ho! That's too thin! Why that leetle gal is jest gone on you, an' we know it. Them letters is from her, an' nobody else. Ye da'sn't show us th' 'scription, I bet!"

"You kin bet I *won't*, anyhow! It is nobody's business, *where* my letters comes from, I reckon."

"Thar, thar, Ele, don't git mad. I was in love once myself, have been thar *several* times, in fact. This hear old heart o' mine is all scarred up. I know jist how 'tis. Have ye called on her lately?"

"Called on who? Who're ye talkin' about, anyhow?"

"Tryfeener, of course."

"No, I ain't. I don't reckon I shall, either. An' I hope some time you fellers will git tired an' give me a rest about her."

"Too bad, too bad! Ye'd orter go 'round an' see her once in a while, Ele, an' sort o' cheer her up. If ye only—"

"Oh! let up!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" from the crowd.

Eleazer tried to take it all as good-naturedly as possible, but that notice on the door was a little more than he could stand and keep his temper.

Presently the office was opened, and then the crowd formed in line and advanced.

Eleazer's turn came presently, and he raised himself up on his toes and inquired:

"Eleazer Brown?"

There was the letter, sure enough, and the little postmistress handed it out face downward, as usual.

"Ha! he's got it, boyees, sure pop!" the man behind him called out at once.

"Whar from? Did ye see th' writin'?" etc., were the cries from every side.

"From Tryfeener, as usual."

Another burst of laughter followed, and Eleazer hastily thrust the letter into his pocket, left the office, and hurried off to his boarding-place.

Arriving there, he hurriedly sought his room, locked the door, lighted his lamp, and then opened the letter and proceeded to read it.

It was indeed from Tryphena, and it was almost smothered in forget-me-nots.

"Lordy! jest ter see th' posies!" Eleazer gasped. "Loads o' 'em! Fergit-me-nots, I b'lieve they call 'em. Lordy! a feller couldn't fergit Tryphena; she won't give him time."

And in this letter the love-sick maid had fairly "let herself loose," as the recipient expressed it.

It was longer than usual, more highly scented, if possible, fairly bubbled over with tender gushes of love, and the endearing terms employed were legion.

It ended thus:

"Ice is cold and so is snow;

You're the sweetest man I know.

"TRYPHENA MARKS."

"Lord bless me!" Eleazer gasped, "but she's gettin' worse an' worse! I wonder how long it takes this complaint to run its course? Is it anything like th' measles? Confound it! why wasn't she built after th' same model I was? I believe I'm beginnin' ter git a little in love ag'in myself, an' if she was only a little shorter, or I was a little longer, hang me if I *wouldn't* marry her. As it is—oh Lord!"

"But, it's no use. Th' more you side up, Tryphena, th' more I'm goin' ter shy off; an' if you side up *too* much; by hokey I'll shy off fer parts unknown. If this'll end when leap-year ends, I wish ter goodness th' year was nearer out than it is. I'm actually gittin' afeerd o' that gal, an' if I don't keep my top eye open wide she'll corral me yet, sure as guns."

"Not that I don't like ye, Tryphena, fer I *do*; but you're too big. I couldn't love all of ye at one settin', be no use ter try. I'm sorry fer ye,

Tryphena, I swear to goodness I am; but what kin I do? I'd like ter 'ease th' longin' of yer heart,' and let ye 'lay yer head upon my manly breast,' but I fear I never shall, unless ye git me foul. 'Only one little line is all ye ask,' but that's too many. I'm too old a bird ter commit myself on paper, you bet! I hope yer heart *won't* break, fer that would be bad; but really I don't see how I'm ter help it. I *can't* help it, not 'thout runnin' inter danger, an' I don't want ter do *that*."

"How sweet this letter smells! an' what real purty posies, too! I *hate* ter burn it, I swear to goodness I do! but I'll *have* ter do it, so here goes. Good-night, Tryphena!"

As he spoke he held the letter in the flame of the lamp, and in a few moments it was reduced to ashes, as all its predecessors had been.

Then, with that great care removed from his mind, Eleazer sallied forth to enjoy the evening.

In the mean time the shades of evening had deepened into shades of night over Silver Nugget, and at last the crowd in front of the post-office was rewarded.

As the darkness deepened, the luminous paint began to glow, until finally the notice could be read in words of fire.

The two night watchmen were on hand, curious to see whether the wonderful paint would or would not prove the truth of what they had told concerning it.

"There!" exclaimed the one who had been the first to discover the notice, "now ye see it fer yerselves, don't ye?"

"Not quite as bright as it was when we first seen it, though," remarked his comrade, "Joe."

"No, not quite, that's so."

This was true, but it was no doubt owing to the fact that the street was not so dark. There were street-lamps, and lights in every window along the main street.

There the notice was, though, plain to be seen, and it was the wonder of the hour.

Who could "Samuel Dunton" be?

That was the question on all lips.

And why was he advertised for in such a peculiar way? And who had put the notice up? Questions no one could answer.

The crowd changed constantly, as people came and went, but after two hours had passed it was scarcely less large than it had been at first.

There was something fascinating about the mysterious notice. The fiery words seemed to burn themselves into the reader's brain, and to hold his attention in a way that was beyond his power to resist.

Who could Samuel Dunton be?

The question was upon everybody's lips, and if the theory agreed upon by Judge Lawrence and the postmaster was a correct one, whoever it was wanted to reach Samuel Dunton was likely to do so, if such a man lived and was anywhere in the State; for thousands of persons had seen the notice, and it was the talk of the town.

Late in the evening, when the crowd was about gone, a young man came down the street, walking leisurely.

When he reached the post-office he glanced at the remnant of the crowd, and then looked the other way to find what they were gazing at.

There the mysterious notice was, burning more brightly than it had been at any other time during the evening.

The instant the young man's eyes fell upon it, he stopped short.

"A letter for Samuel Dunton!" he exclaimed under his breath, "what can it mean? Is it a trap?"

After gazing at the notice for a few minutes, he entered into conversation concerning it with the men who stood near, one of whom happened to be the night watchman who had first seen it, and in a short time he knew all the little that was known about it.

The young man presently passed on, but as he went away he mused:

"A letter for Samuel Dunton, an important letter, and all this trouble and mystery about it. What can it mean? I will know. This night that letter shall be called for."

CHAPTER XXIII.

SULPHUR SAM IN TOWN.

AND it was on this evening at an early hour, that Ivan Oswald called at the Lawrence residence.

He had resolved to put his fate to the test. He had resolved to ask Lulu Lawrence to become his wife.

He was cordially received, as usual, and Lulu's pleasant manner gave him encouragement.

At last, at what he considered an opportune moment, he asked the momentous question.

Lulu's manner changed at once.

Instead of free, laughing and merry, she became sober and earnest in an instant.

And the change was so sudden that Ivan Oswald guessed the answer before it was spoken.

"Mr. Oswald," Lulu answered, slowly and earnestly, "I am sorry our friendship has led to this. I had no idea that your regard for me was anything more than friendly. While I regard

you as a friend, and like you, I do not love you and I cannot give you the promise you ask. I can never marry you."

We have seen Ivan Oswald's character pretty plainly, and his words and actions on this occasion must be taken for what they were worth.

"My God! you do not refuse me?" he gasped.

"I do—I must."

"Can you not give me some word of encouragement, some word of hope?"

"No, none. My answer is given."

The young man threw himself upon his knees before her, caught her hand, and madly, passionately pleaded his cause.

But it was all to no purpose.

Lulu remained firm.

Her answer had been perfectly straightforward and truthful. She did not love the man, and knew that she never could. She liked him well enough as a friend, but as a lover—No, she could never consent to marry him.

More than this, and something she hardly dared confess even to herself, her heart had gone out to the daring young stranger who had that morning rescued her and her friend Claudia from the hands of the road-agent.

Yes, had she confessed the truth, she loved Rainbow Rob.

"Mr. Oswald," she presently said, "I hope you will accept my answer as final, and that you will let the question pass. It is useless for you to insist."

"You drive me to despair," Ivan cried, as he rose to his feet. "You have made my heart change to stone. In life there is no hope for me now. All, all is lost!"

At that moment Judge Lawrence entered the room.

"What! A quarrel?" he exclaimed and questioned in a breath.

"No, papa," Lulu answered. "Not a quarrel."

"No, sir, it is no quarrel," Ivan confirmed; "it is worse—for me. I have, as you gave me permission to do, just asked your daughter to become my wife."

"Oh! ah! I see."

"And she has refused."

"It is true, papa; I have refused. I do not love Mr. Oswald, and I can never marry him."

"But you will learn to love me," the lover pleaded. "I will be so devoted, so—"

"No, no; my answer is final. I will not become your wife."

"That settles it, young man," said the judge. "You have heard the decision, and there is no appeal."

"But, Judge Lawrence, will you not use your influence in my behalf? I—"

"No, sir, I will not. I have no objection to you, if you can win Lulu's regard and consent, but you must not look for help from me. My daughter is free to choose whom she will, and in no case will I interfere unless it be to save her from making what I might have good reasons to believe to be a false step. No, sir; you must plead your own case."

"And I have told him, papa, as plainly as I can, what my answer is."

"Then, Mr. Oswald, the case is settled," declared the judge. "I am sorry for you, but there is no appeal."

"I shall not give up hopes yet," the lover declared. "You may change your mind, and—"

"Never, Mr. Oswald. The answer I have given is final, and I hope you will so consider it. I trust you will never let the question come up again. As a friend I like you, but we can never be more to each other than that."

"Still I do not give up. You will pardon my hasty departure, I hope."

As he spoke, he was sidling toward the door, evidently desiring to give the impression that he was too overcome to trust himself longer there.

"Certainly," answered Lulu, "and we shall be pleased to have you call at any time. Now that you understand me perfectly, there need be no interruption of our friendly regard. I shall still look upon you as my friend."

"Yes, call when you will, certainly," the judge echoed. "You are always welcome."

Ivan Oswald bowed himself out, and in a moment more was out of the house and walking toward his hotel with rapid strides.

"Curse her!" he grated, "she *shall* be mine. She has led me on, just for the vain pleasure of casting me aside now. But I am not done with her yet. I will tame her. By fair means or otherwise, I care not how, Lulu Lawrence shall be my wife!"

"By heavens, she *must* be mine! My fortune depends on it! The time for the opening of that accursed silver casket is drawing near, and who can foretell what fortune she will fall heir to? It must be one or the other of the two, Claudia or Lulu, and it shall be the latter."

"But the silver casket. Where can it be? It is a mystery profound."

When he reached the hotel, he was in no enviable frame of mind, and he went at once to his private room to consider plans for future action.

A short time later, for as we have said, it was early in the evening, Rainbow Rob set out from

the hotel with the intention of making a brief call at the Lawrence residence.

He had not gone far when he overtook Alvin Howe and Claudia Madison, who were walking slowly.

Rob spoke to them, and both greeted him cordially.

"What a silent fellow you are!" Howe exclaimed.

"Silent? I?" Rob queried.

"Yes. Miss Madison has just been telling me about her adventure with the road-agent this morning, and how you came to the rescue. You said nothing about it, though you spent an hour with me this afternoon."

"I never tell of adventures where the big 'I' has to be emphasized," was Rob's ready excuse. "I am justly proud, though, of having been of service to the ladies," he added.

"As well you may be," Howe agreed, "and especially in rescuing them from so notorious a character as Sulphur Sam. By the way, where are you going? Or are you simply taking a stroll, with no objective point in view?"

"I am going to make a brief call upon Judge Lawrence and his daughter," Rob answered.

"Why, that is just where we are going, too," exclaimed Claudia.

"Indeed! Then I shall have company, if you will permit me to join you."

"Do so, by all means," Howe and Claudia both invited. "We shall be pleased to have you do so."

"And, indeed," Claudia added, with a laugh, "you cannot well do otherwise, unless you choose to run on ahead."

"Or to lag behind," supplemented Howe.

"Neither of which I care to do," said Rob, "so I will remain where I am, since I have permission."

All this, and much more, in a chatty way, as they walked along; and they were soon at their destination.

Judge Lawrence had gone out, and the young people had the parlor all to themselves.

They sung and played, and made merry generally.

Lulu Lawrence could not, and perhaps did not try to conceal her pleasure at being in Rainbow Rob's company again, and the pleasure was evidently mutual.

They had been attracted toward each other from the first, and it did not require a sage to prophesy what their acquaintance would lead to.

The evening was a most enjoyable one to them all.

Here were four of the heirs of old Barton Lawrence.

Rainbow Rob and Alvin Howe were two; their secret was known to each other, and they had mutually agreed to make it known to no one else.

Lulu and Claudia were the other two, and the secret was shared between them on like conditions.

The one hundredth anniversary of old Barton Lawrence's death was near at hand, and it seemed that some unseen influence was at work bringing his heirs together.

In his letter to his children he had said that it would be his prayer to Providence so to order the destinies of his descendants that when the day arrived they should all be found in one country, and near to one another.

Was that prayer being answered?

Here were four of the living eight; the fathers of the two girls made six; Tryphena Marks, as we have shown, was the seventh, and there was yet one other.

Who was that one?

From what we have let fall of a conversation between Judge Lawrence and Henry Madison, the reader has no doubt surmised that that one was the Samuel Dunton, whose name was so well known to the whole town, thanks to the wonderful notice upon the post-office door.

If so, who was Samuel Dunton?

We shall see anon.

While the little party in the parlor of the Lawrence residence were in the midst of the evening's pleasure, a pair of flashing eyes were looking in upon the happy couples from without.

And those eyes were those of the young man who, later on, took such an interest in the mysterious advertisement on the post-office door.

"There is that good-looking sport," he mused, "making love to the girl he had the good luck to rescue to-day—or to one of the girls, more properly. And if I am any judge, they are in love with each other. I have half a mind to try a shot at him."

As he spoke he partly drew a revolver from his belt.

"No, it would not do," he decided. "I can overlook his interference of to-day, but he must not cross my path again. If he does— Well, he will find that Sulphur Sam is not always to be caught off his guard."

"As to that handsome, queenly girl, he is welcome to her. Tastes differ, and mine is for the other one, decidedly. I would hate to mar that railroad fellow's happiness, but if that girl ever falls in my way again I shall be tempted to carry her off."

"What an uproar that would make! Ha,

ha, ha! The reward for the road-agent would be doubled at once, and the case would become interesting."

"Where is the sheriff and his gang, I wonder? I expected they would be after me ere this. I guess I'll have to wake the town up to-night, and let them know that Sulphur Sam is still alive!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE GHOST AGAIN.

SAMUEL DUNTON, as we have now virtually revealed, was Sulphur Sam, the road-agent, upon whose head a price was set in nearly every county in Colorado.

He had never revealed his true name, though, since becoming an outlaw, and few had ever seen his face when he was mounted as Sulphur Sam.

At other times he entered the towns boldly under an assumed name, and often when the search for him had been hot among the hills and canyons, he was quietly enjoying his ill-got gains in Denver.

Leading such a life, we can imagine what his suspicions were when he beheld the notice, in letters of fire, on the post-office door.

When he went on up the street, after his conversation with the group of men in front of the post-office, he was determined to return and get the letter.

"A letter for Samuel Dunton," he mused, "an important letter, and all this trouble and mystery about it. What can it mean? I will know. This night that letter shall be called for."

He went on, crossed the railroad, passed out of town, and crossed the bridge that spanned Dismal Canyon.

Then he continued on up the Old Trail for some distance, finally turning to the right into a narrow path.

A few minutes later he came to a clump of trees.

Here he was welcomed by a whinny from his horse.

"Ah! you're safe, eh, Black Satan?" the outlaw exclaimed, and going up to the animal he patted its glossy neck.

The horse answered with another whinny, and rubbed its nose against its master's shoulder affectionately.

At that moment a voice was heard, causing Sulphur Sam to whip a revolver from his belt and prepare to defend himself.

The words spoken were these:

"Samuel Dunton, or Sulphur Sam, I would have a word with you."

"Who are you, and where are you?" the outlaw demanded.

He could not determine whence the voice came. It might be above, below, to the right or to the left, behind or before him; it seemed to float in the very air.

"No matter who I am, no matter where," came the reply, "I mean no harm to you. I am here to tell you something that is for your good."

"I take no stock in that," Sam declared. "Sulphur Sam has no friend. His hand is against every man, and every man's hand is against him. Do not say you are my friend."

"I am not your friend, nor am I your enemy. My position toward you is neither for nor against. Now, however, I am here to give you friendly advice."

"If that is true, if you are neutral in your position, come forth and show yourself. I promise not to harm you."

"Ha, ha, ha!" came the hollow, weird voice, in mocking laughter, "you could not harm me if you would. Can you harm that which is neither living nor dead?"

"What do you mean?" the outlaw asked, and not without a feeling of uneasiness creeping over him.

"I mean what I say; that I am that which is neither living nor dead."

"Then what are you? Come forth and show yourself."

"You do not realize what you ask. A sight of me would chill your blood."

The uncomfortable feeling which Sulphur Sam experienced increased, but he showed a bold front.

"Never mind my blood," he rejoined, "but come forth and let me see you. I do not like to talk to a person or thing I cannot see. I guess I can stand it if you can."

"You are very bold."

"I am no coward."

"So I have heard it said of you."

"You say I am Sulphur Sam?"

"So I called you; or, in your true name, Samuel Dunton."

"You may be mistaken."

"Ha, ha, ha! I know what I assert; there is no chance for mistake. I do not ask you to acknowledge your identity, for I know you."

"And taking me to be Sulphur Sam, you say you have something to say to me?"

"So I said."

"Something that is for my good?"

"Yes."

"And you declare that you intend me no harm?"

"Such were my words; I intend you no harm."

These questions were asked with a purpose.

Sulphur Sam was trying hard to locate the direction whence the voice came.

This, however, he found it impossible to do.

It seemed to come from all directions at once.

"Well, then," he invited, "come forth and let me hear what you have to say."

"Very well, I come."

In this clump of trees all was intense darkness.

No light could be seen in any direction, except here and there where a star searched out a space to peep through the dense foliage.

It was so dark that Sulphur Sam could barely see his hand before him.

How he expected to see his mysterious interlocutor, when he invited him to "come forth and show himself," he did not stop to reason.

In a moment more, however, he beheld a sight that for an instant sent a chill to his very marrow.

As the words "I come" were uttered, the outlaw caught a sudden glimpse of light a short distance away to his left, and then he beheld a most frightful apparition.

There, upon a low rock, it seemed, unless the figure was remarkably tall, stood a form in white, glowing with a supernatural phosphorescent light. It was covered from head to feet, but through its white, winding sheet-like robe, could be seen the outlines of a human skeleton.

It was the same apparition we have seen appear to Ivan Oswald.

With a snort of terror the outlaw's horse jumped back, and pulled hard to get away.

"Did I not say a sight of me would chill your blood?" the awful specter asked.

"My blood is still running," Sulphur Sam answered, with a show of bravery he did not feel, "and running warm. You startle my horse a little, though." And he tried to quiet the animal.

"Perhaps I had better disappear," the specter suggested, "and talk to you from the air again, as at first."

"No," said Sam, "stay where you are and say your say. My horse will be quiet in a moment, and I am sure I can stand it."

"Very well, just as you will. And now pay attention to what I have to say to you."

"For a long time you have been a highway robber. Your deeds have been bold and desperate ones. You have even gone so far as to dip your hands into human blood. There is a price upon your head in several of the counties of this State. The officers of the law are upon your track. Is this not so?"

"Go on."

"You have just learned that there is a letter at the Silver Nugget post-office addressed to you. No doubt you intend to call for it. The peculiar notice on the door says the letter is important. You are curious to know what it is. Am I not right?"

"Go on, go on."

"I will. That letter is important. It will point out to you the turning-point of your life. It will show you a glorious road to Reform. I believe few people have seen your face to know you as Sulphur Sam, and that your real name is not known at all. This is most fortunate for you, if you will only take advantage of your opportunity."

"In that letter you will find a summons that will surprise you. You may or may not have heard of the secret it will speak of. But, by all means obey the summons, and from that hour reform."

"Give up at once your present life of dishonesty and crime, come to Silver Nugget openly as Samuel Dunton, start life anew, and you will have a fair chance to regain what you have lost."

"This I tell you for your own good."

"And what if I do not choose to follow your advice?"

"Then, sooner or later, you will surely be called upon to pay the penalty for your crimes."

"And if I do obey you—"

"Then, as I said, you may begin life anew. And now I leave you. Go, with caution, and claim your letter, and when you have read it remember what I have said. Good-night."

In a moment, then, the light changed to darkness, and the figure was gone.

"You are in a rush to be off!" the outlaw exclaimed: "I am not done talking with you."

"Ha, ha, ha!" came the weird, mocking laughter, seemingly floating upon the air; and then the words: "It is not by your will that I am here, but by my own; and it is by my own will that I go."

"By heavens, if you don't come back and answer a few questions," Sulphur Sam cried, now master of his nerves again, "I will fire a dozen shots in your direction!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" the mocking laughter came back, now seeming further away.

"Who are you?" the road-agent demanded.

"How do you come to know me? How do you know the contents of that letter? How—"

Back again came the taunting laugh, now still further away than ever, and then all was still.

For some moments Sulphur Sam stood silent in thought.

What could be the meaning of what he had just seen and heard?

Surely the sight had been one well calculated to freeze the blood of almost any mortal.

He, however, now that he could reflect upon it, was no believer in ghosts and the like.

This wonderful apparition, whatever it had been was, he believed, produced by entirely human means.

This being so, by whom?

What man knew his name there? and what man was interested in his future?

These questions he revolved in his mind for some time, and the more he thought the matter over the more firmly fixed became the idea that this was a trap.

If they, the sheriff and his men, could lure him into town, they might figure upon an easy capture.

Now, however, he was forearmed.

But, if such was the object of the letter, he reasoned again, why had they taken the very step most likely to put him upon his guard?

This he could not understand, and this was one point in favor of the strange words spoken by the mysterious apparition.

For some time he studied well the situation, and then the dare-devil of his nature asserted itself, and he resolved to ride boldly into town, demand his letter, and then carry out his first intention of "waking the town up."

Accordingly, he at once prepared his horse, looked well to his weapons, and then mounted and set out.

At the hour of midnight he rode into Silver Nugget, masked, and went direct to the post-office door, where the fiery notice still glowed brightly.

CHAPTER XXV.

TWO MEN FROM LONDON.

THE reader remembers, in a previous chapter, the sending of a mysterious telegram to New York.

We will now follow that telegram to its destination, since the interest of our romance demands it.

It is an early hour of the forenoon, on the day of September 16th, 1880.

A messenger boy is seen hurrying up Sixth avenue.

Turning into Thirty-fifth street he hurries on to No. 295, springs up the steps and gives a pull at the bell.

In a moment a servant opens the door.

"Jabez Howard here?" the boy asks briefly.

"Yes," the answer.

"Message for him."

The servant takes the message and the boy's book, is gone a moment, returns and gives the book to the boy, and the door closes.

In a neatly-furnished library sits the man to whom the telegram has just been delivered.

He is a man full sixty-five years of age. His hair and beard are as white as snow. In appearance he is in feeble health, and he is a cripple.

This man is Jabez Howard, the authorized custodian of the now missing silver casket.

Wiping his spectacles and putting them on, he tears the telegram open and reads it.

"Thank Heaven, my detective is meeting with success at last!" he muttered. "I was almost in despair, but now, at the eleventh hour, as it were, the tables turn. McDonald is a man in a thousand, and he shall be rewarded as he deserves."

"All is safe," he says; "seven of the eight are found, and I am looking for the one." Does he mean the eighth one? or the one—him who played me false? I take it that he means the eighth heir. His 'all is safe' seems to cover all the other points.

"And now the great day draws near to hand. What will it bring forth? Shall I find these eight heirs worthy of the man who bestowed upon them the contents of the silver casket? I hope so."

"And Basil Howard—unworthy of the name!—the young rascal who so basely deceived me, what of him? I wonder what punishment will be meted out to him? He cannot escape, for, as I firmly believe, there is a great supernatural agency at work in the case."

"I have almost proof that such is the fact. There I was, right at death's door, as I firmly believe. I chose Basil Howard to succeed me in the trust of the silver casket, and gave up to die. He played me false, and at once I was called back, out of the very grave almost, to recover the casket and carry the work on to the end."

"Another instance is in the fact that all those heirs, it seems, are found in Colorado, and all in one town. It was the prayer of old Barton Lawrence that this should be so."

For a long time the old man sat thinking, the telegram in one hand and his spectacles in the other, and he was roused out of his reverie only when there was another ring at the bell.

In a moment two cards were carried in.

Mr. Howard put on his specs and glanced at them, and then ordered:

"Show the gentlemen in at once."

The servant withdrew to obey, and the old man sat up in his chair in a more dignified way than he had occupied, saying to himself:

"The two lawyers from London, eh? The affair now begins to assume a decided form."

The next moment the two men entered.

They were about forty to forty-five years of age, at a guess, and had the appearance of well-to-do English counselors.

"Mr. Andrews and Mr. Wilson? The old gentleman interrogated, as he glanced at the cards he held.

"At your service, sir," the two replied.

"Allow me to welcome you," extending his hand. "I am Jabez Howard, with whom you have corresponded."

The Englishmen shook hands with him warmly and then were invited to sit down.

"We arrived by steamer yesterday," said Mr. Andrews, "and stopped at the hotel over night. We should have notified you of our arrival, but did not deem it necessary, after your invitation to come to your house, which we received before we left England."

Considerable conversation followed, foreign to the interest of our story, and at last Mr. Wilson remarked:

"Well, Mr. Howard, any new developments in the case in which we are interested; and in the interest of which we have come to America?"

"Yes, Mr. Wilson," was the reply, "there are."

"Ah!" from both the solicitors at once, "that is good. May we inquire what those developments are?"

"Certainly: and I'll explain. You must allow me to do so in my own way, however. I shall go back to the time of my severe illness, five years ago, when the silver casket was stolen."

"As you please, sir," from Mr. Andrews.

"In 1875," Mr. Howard began, "I fell very ill, and certainly expected to die. I hastened then to do what I had before neglected; namely, to appoint my successor as guardian to the silver casket and the important Lawrence trust."

"I looked about carefully to find a suitable person, and finally chose Basil Howard, a guardian of one of my elder brothers. He was a smart, promising young man. But, as I did not know then, he was a rascal at heart, and I made a great mistake in selecting him."

"All this I have told you in our correspondence, gentlemen, but I am leading up to something you have not heard."

"As I said, my choice could not have been worse; and had I died then, the silver casket would have been lost forever."

"I was seriously ill for many months, but at last I got well, and then I learned that Basil Howard had disappeared, taking the silver casket and all the records with him."

"Imagine my emotions if you can."

"I at once employed an able detective, one Martin McDonald, to take charge of the case. I engaged him at a liberal salary, and he promised to devote himself to the task—an almost hopeless one. I told him the whole story, and gave him all the information I could, which, owing to my long illness having impaired my memory, was little enough; and sent him out into the world to recover the silver casket and place it again in my hands before October 2d, 1880."

"Imagine his task."

"For more than four years he has been at work, and not until within the few weeks past has he met with any success. But now our efforts seem about to be rewarded. Here is a telegram, dated yesterday, which I received only a little while before you came in. I will read it aloud:

"SILVER NUGGET, COL., Sept. 15, 1880.

"TO JABEZ HOWARD, ESQ.

"295 West 35th Street, New York:—

"All is safe. Seven of the eight are found. Am looking for the one."

"MARTIN McDONALD."

"You see, gentlemen, success seems to be within my grasp at last."

"It does indeed!" Mr. Wilson exclaimed.

"But," questioned Mr. Andrews, "what of the silver casket? How do we know where it is? or that its contents are safe?"

"I have implicit confidence in my detective," answered Mr. Howard, "and you see his words are: 'All is safe.' I fully believe he has recovered the silver casket, and that it is now in his possession."

"Certainly, certainly," agreed Mr. Wilson, "there seems to be no doubt of it. And everything is due to you, Mr. Howard, and to your untiring perseverance."

"It was my business to persevere, it was my duty," Mr. Howard declared. "Forty years ago I took upon myself the obligation, sealing my promise with a solemn and binding oath, to guard the silver casket and keep the family record. For forty years I have lived in moderate luxury, supported by the endowment made by Barton Lawrence a hundred years ago, and I almost owe my very life to the cause. Speak not of my 'untiring perseverance,' Mr. Wilson. Could I have been twice as persevering, yet I would have been doing only my duty."

"Well said," observed Mr. Andrews. "We will amend Mr. Wilson's remark, and say that everything is due to your determination to fulfill your promise."

"There is so little difference between the original and the amendment," Mr. Howard averred, "that I can accept neither. I was, and am, striving to perform a duty."

"And with untiring perseverance," insisted Mr. Wilson.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Mr. Andrews; "and with determination to fulfill your promise. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Stop," interrupted—or tried to—Mr. Howard, raising his hands, "stop and hear me. Give all the credit to my detective, Mr. McDonald. Credit to whom credit is due, always. In this case, he is the man."

"Well, well, just as you will."

And so their little pleasantries ended, and they settled down to the business in hand.

"It will be necessary for us to go to Colorado, I suppose," Mr. Wilson presently remarked.

"Yes, of course," responded Mr. Andrews, "unless those in Colorado can be induced to come here, which is not likely."

"You will have to go there," said Mr. Howard, "and I must go, too, if I can get there."

"When must we start?" inquired Mr. Andrews.

"By the twenty-fourth at latest," Mr. Howard declared.

The conversation was carried on to a great length, but since it is as impossible as unnecessary to repeat it here, why dwell longer upon the subject?

The two lawyers remained to dine with Mr. Howard, and then returned to their hotel.

Five days later Mr. Howard received a long letter from his detective.

In that letter the detective recounted what he had done, and the objects accomplished.

It was dated the 15th, and everything up to that date was explained in full.

It concluded thus:

"***** That is all. The place of meeting is the Colorado House, in Silver Nugget, Col., on Saturday, October 21, 1880. All will be notified to be present. Respectfully, MARTIN McDONALD."

Mr. Howard sent at once for the two lawyers, and their plan of action was laid, as far as possible.

On the 22d they started for Denver, where they intended to remain until the morning of October 2d, when they would go on to Silver Nugget.

We have now followed that mysterious message to its destination; introduced its recipient, Mr. Jabez Howard; made the acquaintance of the two London lawyers, Mr. Andrews and Mr. Wilson, and have shown our object.

Let us close the chapter and push forward to other scenes.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A BRUSH WITH THE SHERIFF.

WHEN Sulphur Sam rode so boldly into Silver Nugget, midnight though it was, he fully realized that he was running a great risk.

He was taking his life in his hands.

The sheriff, as he had sufficient and good reason to believe, had not forgotten him. On the contrary, he had barely begun his hunt.

And the reward offered for his capture would make every man his enemy.

Straight to the post-office he went, however, and knocked loudly at the door with his revolver.

The streets were not by any means deserted, and several passers paused and looked at the daring black rider in surprise.

In a moment a window was opened, and Henry Madison's voice demanded:

"Who is there? and what is wanted?"

"You have a notice here on the door that there is a letter here for Samuel Dunton. I am he."

"But, this is rather out of regular office hours," the postmaster complied.

"Can't help it. I'll give you a dollar, though, if you will give me the letter now."

"Oh! I will oblige you, sir, without reward," Mr. Madison said, and he shut the window and disappeared.

Only a minute had passed, yet several more persons had appeared upon the scene.

None, however, had yet approached close enough to recognize the outlaw, even if any of those present had ever seen him.

In a moment more the postmaster appeared in the office with a light, and soon opened the door.

Judge of his surprise to behold a masked man there.

The postmaster had the letter in his hand, but before delivering it he stopped to ask:

"You say you are Samuel Dunton?"

The light from the partly opened door fell full upon the outlaw, and at that instant some one cried:

"Sulphur Sam!"

Without replying to the postmaster's inquiry, Sam reached forward with a sudden movement, snatched the letter away, wheeled about and darted down the street like the wind.

The next instant a volley of wildly-fired pistol-shots rung out upon the night air.

No shot, however, took effect, and with wild yells Sulphur Sam dashed on.

That portion of the town was soon astir, and the cause of the excitement was quickly made known.

Sheriff Barkmore and several of his deputies had been prepared for just such an event as this.

They had had their horses ready for instant use since the forenoon.

The sheriff was the first to appear, mounted.

"Which way did the rascal go?" he demanded.

"Straight down the street," he was told, and that was all any one could explain.

The sheriff blew a shrill blast upon a whistle, and it was not many moments before he was joined by three of his men.

And then away they went at full speed, in the direction the outlaw had taken.

The night was dark, as has been shown, and the chase promised to be a useless one from the very start; but Barkmore had made up his mind to give chase the very next time the outlaw was seen, be it night or day.

And now on he went, fully determined to capture the road-agent if possible.

He had no idea that the outlaw would leave the main trail until he came to the place where the other trail branched off toward Bonanza, and perhaps not then, so to that point he and his men rode with unremitting speed.

Arriving there they stopped, and the sheriff himself dismounted and placed his ear to the ground.

Hoof-strokes were audible, but he could not determine their direction to his satisfaction at first.

Lighting a match, he examined the ground.

This gave him the clew.

"Toward Bonanza," he said, and in an instant he was mounted again and pressing on.

Some time later they stopped again, and the sheriff listened as before.

This time no sound could be heard.

"The rascal has either stopped," he declared, "or has distanced us badly."

"It can't be that, th' last," one of his men argued, "for we have been comin' like blazes."

"Mebby he is walkin' his beast," another reasoned.

"Or has turned off an' rounded us," suggested the third.

"Well," Barkmore decided, "we will press on to the canyon, anyhow. Come on!" And on they dashed.

Three minutes or so later there was a sudden flash and report right ahead of them, from the rocks at the side of the trail, and one of the deputies' horses stumbled and fell, throwing its rider over its head.

Instantly Barkmore and the other two poured a volley of lead in the direction whence the flash had come.

"Ha, ha, ha!" came the mocking laugh of Sulphur Sam. "How are you, gentlemen?"

With the words there came another shot, and one of the deputies received the ball in the flesh of his leg.

"Want any more?" the outlaw declared.

"I want *you*," was the sheriff's retort, and slipping from his horse he ran toward the spot where the outlaw was concealed.

A few shots from his deputies in that direction warned him of the folly of that move, made independently and in such darkness, and he retreated again quickly.

"Want any more?" Sulphur Sam demanded again, as he fired two or three more shots, none of which, however, took effect.

The sheriff and his men remained for the moment silent, and then a low whistle-signal from Barkmore directed the deputies what to do.

They were to surround the point and try to capture the daring road-agent.

The one who had been thrown from his horse was unhurt, and the other, the wounded one, was still good for service, though his wound was painful.

Thus they were, practically, four against one.

All was silent for a moment, except the slight noises made by the advancing party, and then suddenly Sulphur Sam was heard to explain:

"Ha! going to surround me, eh? Well, come on, and I'll try and make it pleasant for you."

No more was said, then, and two minutes passed.

Then the sheriff's whistle was heard, and the next moment he and the deputies rushed forward.

Then a curious thing happened.

The sheriff and two of his men laid heavy hands upon the third deputy, and with revolvers pressed against his head commanded him to surrender in the name of the law.

"Ha, ha, ha!" the wild laugh of the outlaw came to them from some distance up the trail, and then with a wild shout and a parting shot from his revolver he darted away, the heavy hoof-strokes of his horse echoing loudly. "Ha, ha, ha!" and he was gone.

"Say! dang it!" the captured deputy cried, "let up! I ain't th' road-agent; I'm Jake!"

There was "tall" swearing done then, as may be imagined, and for that night the chase was given up.

Barkmore was all the more determined, though, that Sulphur Sam should be taken, and swore that he would be the man to do it.

Sadly disappointed they returned to town, with the understanding among them that the particulars of their adventure were not to be mentioned.

And now let us follow the outlaw.

For two miles or so he continued on at a lively gait, then he reduced his speed to a walk, and presently turned aside from the trail and entered upon an almost invisible path.

In the darkness it was invisible.

Allowing his horse to walk, then, as in truth it was necessary to do, owing to the uncertainty of the footing, the daring road-agent made his way toward the secret haunts of the mountains.

In about half an hour, or a little longer, may be, he entered a narrow pass between two towering walls of rock, and in a few minutes emerged into a small basin-like court, if so it may be called.

Here he dismounted.

A faint light could be seen a short distance away, and advancing to it the outlaw gave a kick at the door of a rude cabin.

"Hello! hello!" was the instant response, and the door was quickly opened by a rough-looking man.

"That you?" he queried.

"Yes," Sulphur Sam answered briefly, "it is. Go and see to my horse."

The man went at once, and Sam threw off his hat and coat, stirred up the little fire, and sat down.

This, for the time being, was Sulphur Sam's den, and the man we have seen was a rascal whom he employed to take care of his horse, provide food, and do other menial work.

"Well, this has been a night worth living for!" the road-agent exclaimed. "Such adventures stir up my blood, and put life into me. I believe I was born for the very role I am playing. I could not be contented in any other place."

"Sulphur Sam, so they call me, and a very suggestive title. Sulphur is often scented when I am around. Give me time, and I will carve my name upon the history of Colorado. I—But, I have been warned to reform. I must see what is in this mysterious letter."

Taking the letter from an inner pocket of his vest, he opened it, drew forth the sheet it contained, and read:

"1780. THOU ART ONE. 1890.

"SAMUEL DUNTON, thou art one of the present eight living descendants of Mr. Barton Lawrence, who died October 2, 1870. Thou art hereby summoned to be present at the Colorado House, in the town of Silver Nugget, on Saturday, October 2, 1890, at ten o'clock in the forenoon, bringing proof of thy identity.

"Remember the Silver Casket."

"Great Christopher!" Sulphur Sam exclaimed, "what is the meaning of all this? Who the merry imps was Barton Lawrence? and how does any one know that I am one of his heirs? Somebody knows more about me than I know myself, it seems. And there are eight of us eh? Who are the other seven? And the silver casket, too. What is that? How can I be expected to know everything about something I never heard of before? There is a mystery here.

"And what am I to do about it! Confound it, I have taken a false step, and now I cannot take the advice of my ghostly visitor if I would! In calling openly at the post-office for this, I let out my true name to the public. Besides, I cannot furnish proof of my identity as an heir of a man who died a hundred years ago, and I should like to know of any one who can.

"No; whatever this mystery, I am barred out. I will preserve this notice, however, and see what comes of it all.

"And now to bed!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

RAINBOW ROB'S RUSE.

WE must now go back a step and glance at a wheel that revolved within a wheel, as it were, in a foregoing chapter.

Rainbow Rob, as we have shown, had determined to know more of the mysterious events that were happening at Silver Nugget.

When he left the Lawrence residence, on this evening, and parted with Alvin Howe and Claudia Madison at the post-office, the mysterious notice upon the door there recalled to mind his resolve.

Instead of retiring to his room, as he had intended doing, he strolled on up the street.

When he had gone some distance he crossed over, and then came down again on the opposite side.

Then it was that he saw something that aroused his curiosity to the highest degree.

Opposite to the post-office, standing well in the shadow of a deep doorway, was a man in whom he was interested.

That man was—one whom he suspected of

being Martin McDonald, the sender of the mysterious telegram to New York.

Rob passed right on, without even a glance to show that he had seen the man, and turned into the next street.

As soon as he was around the corner, though, he stopped, and then took up a position where he could see all that took place—or at least all that could be seen in the darkness.

He soon found, however, that he was too far away, and so stepping out he moved up to the second building below the post-office.

This he was enabled to do without fear of being seen by the man he desired to watch, for a crowd of men passed along at that moment, and he found it easy to move along with them to the desired point.

Once there, he was as well fixed as his neighbor across the way.

The only thing he had to fear, as a cause of disturbance, was the appearance of a night-watchman.

They, as it happened, were too much engaged in looking at the mysterious notice on the post-office door, and telling their story over and over to the crowd, to pay much heed to what was going on around.

And so matters stood when Sulphur Sam came along.

When he passed on up the street, after his few minutes' conversation with the men in front of the post-office, he was followed.

He had gone but a short distance when Rainbow Rob saw the man on the opposite side of the street leave his place of concealment and start in the same direction.

"Hello!" Rob thought, "here is something. I thought that fellow was struck when he read the notice, and now that man is going to follow him. Very well, my friend, you keep *him* in sight and I will follow *you*."

A moment later Rainbow Rob was going in the same direction.

He, Rob, was not following the first party, but, as he said he would, was looking after the second one.

And that man, as stated, he believed to be the Martin McDonald who had left the telegram at the telegraph office in such a mysterious manner.

On they went, Samuel Dunton entirely unaware that he was being followed, and his follower ignorant of the fact that a third person was shadowing him.

What came of it, so far as Sulphur Sam was concerned, we have shown.

And Rainbow Rob, the Tulip from Texas, was a silent witness to it all.

While the conversation between the outlaw and the apparition was being carried on, Rob slowly and silently made his way around to a point behind the latter, and close to it.

He heard all that passed, and learned enough to confirm a certain suspicion he had formed.

When the apparition disappeared from the outlaw's view, Rob was ready to follow it, if it proved possible.

Sulphur Sam's threat to shoot in that direction, however, caused him to seek the shelter of a tree, and prudently enough, too.

But no shots were fired, and Rob moved on in the direction in which he had seen a shadowy form disappear.

He had gone but a short distance, though, when a hand suddenly clutched his throat, a pistol touched his face, and a voice exclaimed in a whisper:

"Keep silent, or you die!"

But Rainbow Rob was not the man to be taken completely by surprise.

The instant he felt the presence of the man before him, even before the fingers clutched his throat, he had a revolver in hand.

And the moment a cold muzzle touched his face, his own revolver found the face of his opposer.

"All right, McDonald," Rob whispered in reply, "I'm mum. Let go and put away your gun. I'm Rainbow Rob."

"The deuce you are!" and the hand and revolver were removed at once.

"Sure thing," Rob answered, as he, too, put away his weapon.

"And what are you doing here?"

"I followed you."

"Followed me! Where did you follow me from?"

"From the post-office."

"Thunder! is that so?"

"It is."

"But how came you to know my name?"

"I guessed it."

"Guessed it! Oh, come now, that won't do! How could you guess it?"

"By adding fact to fact and circumstance to circumstance. Two and two make four; four and four make eight; etc., *ad infinitum*."

"But *why* did you follow me here?"

"To learn why you came."

"And you have seen and heard all?"

"I have."

"Well, you are a cute one, as I must admit. Wait until that fellow out there leaves, and then we will have a talk."

"All right."

They had not a great while to wait, for, after

what seemed a long and careful study of his plans, but which was only a few minutes of actual time, the outlaw mounted his horse and rode away.

"Now," said Rob, "we can talk."

"Yes; and now I would like to ask you why you have an interest in me and my movements?"

"First acknowledge you are the man I take you to be."

"McDonald?"

"Yes."

"And if I am, what then?"

"Then I will talk freely, and I think we can come to an understanding all the sooner."

"But, you have asserted that I am he."

"And so I still assert."

"Then why need I confirm or deny it?"

"Because by doing so you will confirm my suspicion."

"Ah! then you only suspect?"

"I not only suspect, but believe."

"And what understanding can we come to?"

"I think we can work this case out together. I may prove useful to you, and you to me."

"Not a bad idea. I like you, and I admire your nerve. And, since you have an interest in the game, I will trust you. I am Martin McDonald."

"Shake!" Rob exclaimed, and extended his hand.

The detective took it, and the pair shook hands warmly.

"Does Sulphur Sam make the eighth of the eight heirs?" Rob presently asked.

"Yes, he does."

"Then you have found them all?"

"Yes."

"I know who three of them are, then."

"Yes, as I am aware. Yourself, Alvin Howe, and Sulphur Sam."

"Exactly."

"Who the others are I prefer not to tell you, at any rate not at present."

"Just as you please."

"I have my reasons for withholding their names."

"Of course. But, by the way, are you aware that Alvin Howe has no proof of his identity?"

"I am aware of it, and I have found the proof he needs."

"I am glad to hear that."

"And your own?"

"Mine is all right. I have sent for the necessary records."

"Good! All the others are provided for, unless it be this Sulphur Sam. Whether he can prove his identity or not I do not know."

"Do you suppose he will dare appear at the opening of the casket?"

"Why not?"

"He will be arrested or killed."

"Not necessarily so. No one knows that Samuel Dutton and Sulphur Sam are one and the same, and if he uses proper caution in calling for that letter, no one need learn his secret."

"That is not Sulphur Sam's way. He is more likely to go to the post-office as Sulphur Sam, and demand his letter at the point of the revolver."

"The more fool he, then. I warned him to use caution, as you heard."

"Yes, true enough, but such men do not know the meaning of the word."

"So it seems. Well, let him do as he will, I have done my part."

"It was you, then, who painted the notice on the post-office door?"

"It was."

"And who delivered the mysterious notices to me, Howe and the others?"

"Yes."

"And it is you, perhaps, who know where the silver casket is?"

"On that one point I must be silent, unless, later on, I decide to take you into my confidence. I will say, however, confidentially to you, that the custodian of that silver casket is Mr. Jabez Howard, of New York."

"And you are employed by him?"

"Yes."

"Then I should naturally infer that the silver casket is in New York."

"That would seem natural, after my words."

"But I do not think anything of the kind."

"You do not?"

"No. I believe that silver casket is here in Colorado."

The detective laughed.

"Well," he said, "I cannot see why you should believe that. But, it does not matter. Unless something of a very remarkable nature occurs, the casket will be forthcoming when it is wanted."

"I have no doubt of it. And in the mean time you will remain in disguise?"

"Yes, I shall remain in disguise."

"And it will be well, perhaps, for us to remain as strangers."

"Yes, I think so."

"Shall you return to town now?"

"Yes; and we will go together as far as the canyon. There we will part."

"Very well. And as we walk along I will tell you something about myself."

They set out, then, and as they went, Rainbow Rob made himself fully known to the detective.

"I am surprised and yet not surprised," McDonald commented. "But, I am glad to know it. I will see you to-morrow, and will then take you wholly into my confidence. It will be better so; for then, in case of accident or death coming to me, you will be able to carry the work forward to its completion."

So they talked, until they reached the canyon bridge, where they parted, McDonald turning into a by-street and Rainbow Rob continuing on to the hotel.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

PROGRESSION AND REVISION.

SEVERAL days slipped by, bringing no events of any special interest to those in whom we are interested.

At Silver Nugget everything jogged along with even tenor.

There had been few events anyhow, and none worthy of more than passing notice in the local papers.

Of those in whom we are immediately interested, however, we may say a few words.

Let us begin with our hero, Rainbow Rob.

He had made two or three brief trips to Denver, but still remained located at Silver Nugget.

There was a loadstone there that attracted him, in the person of pretty Lulu Lawrence.

He had made several calls at the Lawrence residence, had been out riding two or three times in company with Lulu, and the two were on the very best of friendly terms.

Alvin Howe and Claudia Madison, too, called frequently at the Lawrence home, and on one occasion, one evening, the four rode over to a neighboring town some miles distant, in the direction of Denver, and back again.

This was not done without some fear, on the part of the girls, that they would again encounter the road-agent.

But Sulphur Sam was not seen.

He, the outlaw, had been heard from two or three times during the while, making some of the boldest robberies ever heard of in even that wild country.

And he was still at large.

Sheriff Barkmore had made several more attempts to capture him, but the outlaw seemed to know just when and where to expect him and his men, and kept carefully out of the way.

One of his robberies, the latest one reported, was committed in open day, on one of the main trails, and within half an hour after the sheriff, with six men, had passed along on that very road.

This made Barkmore almost wild, and he swore roundly, as he had been doing all along, that Sulphur Sam should meet his fate and at his hands.

But, a word more concerning Rainbow Rob.

Not only was he in high favor with the acknowledged belle of the town, but Judge Lawrence, too, was quite favorably inclined toward him.

So, in fact, was every one whose acquaintance the Tulip had made.

He, Rainbow Rob, had seen more of Detective McDonald, and now shared with him the secret of the whereabouts of the silver casket.

It may seem strange, at first glance, that the New York detective should intrust so important a secret to a comparative stranger; but he had his reasons for so doing, and knew what he was about.

Judge Lawrence and the old postmaster, Henry Madison, met once or twice in the interval, and their main subject of conversation was concerning the silver casket.

In fact, it seemed as though they could think of little else.

But they were no further advanced in information than when they had discussed the affair the first time.

The only new point they had was their well-founded suspicion that Sulphur Sam—Samuel Dutton—was one of the co-heirs.

This point, though, amounted to little.

The Spot Saint from Scarecrow was still in town, idling away his time, almost, as it seemed, calling upon the citizens to repent, and now and again giving out a tract.

Interest in him had now waned, and he came and went at will, without any attention being paid to him.

Dan Gilbert was still around, though not always at night, unless he could escape the vigilant eye of his better half, and was still as full of bluster and blow as ever.

He still claimed to be the "long-clawed grizzly," the "untamed hyena," the "devastating cyclone," etc.

But he had no terrors for Mrs. Dan.

She was a "chief in skirts" indeed.

As for Mr. Down, of the red head—Ben Down, as he was familiarly known—he was as meek and lowly as he well could be, since the galling take-down he had experienced at the hands of Mrs. Gilbert.

Jerry Lynch was still on hand at the Green Bottle, and the saloon was as popular as ever.

And Jim Hogan and Mike Kinnie, who had declared vengeance so dire against Rainbow Rob and the Spot Saint, they are still in jail.

Ivan Oswald, the owner and proprietor of the Colorado House, for reasons best known to himself, had offered bail for them, but bail was refused.

He, Ivan Oswald, had made two or three further attempts to win the consent of Lulu Lawrence to become his wife, but her answer was the same as at first.

And at last, as he became so importunate as to be annoying, Lulu forbade him the house.

There was now but one thing for him to do; namely, to resort to the carrying out of the threats we have seen him make.

And this he secretly resolved to do.

Have we now mentioned all in whom we are interested?

Let us see.

Ah, no! Not a word have we said concerning Eleazer Brown and Tryphena Marks!

It would never do to leave them unmentioned now.

The affair between them was crowding forward to a climax of some description.

Tryphena was growing desperate, and Eleazer was almost crowded to the wall.

There seemed to be but one of two things for him to do, and the choice was apparently left with him.

He must either marry Tryphena, and save her heart from breaking, bursting, collapsing or whatever it was it threatened to do; or else he must throw up a good job with fair prospects, and run away.

Of the two evils he knew not which to choose. It was clearly evident, though, that he would have to decide ere long.

Every day he received a letter, and on some days two; and he was actually growing thin under the heavy strain.

His friends gave him no rest, and his life was becoming a burden almost too heavy to bear.

One evening when he entered the post-office at his usual hour, he was greeted with a howl of laughter that shook the building.

"Wal, ijits," he demanded, "what d'ye see ter laugh at now?"

"Ho, ho, ho!" roared the crowd; and whichever way Eleazer chanced to turn his back, there the merriment burst out anew.

On the little man's back was pinned a sheet of paper, upon which was the following, *verbatim et literatim*:

ETERNELL VIGYLENCE is THE PRICE OF LIBERTY.

In some way or other one of his tormentors had succeeded in securing that notice to the back of his coat.

"We knowed things was gettin' awful desperate, Ele," said one, "but we had no idee it was quite ez bad ez this."

"Bad as what?" Eleazer demanded. "What be ye drivin' at?"

"Why, we knowed Tryphener was after ye purty hot, but we didn't know thet eternal vigilance was th' price of yer liberty."

"No, ner I didn't nuther! Speak out now, an' say what you mean in plain United States, er else keep yer head shut."

"Thar, thar, Ele, don't git r'iled; I mean no 'fense, I 'sure ye."

"Then what do you mean?"

"Wal, when a feller comes 'round here with a sign h'isted on his back, sayin' that 'eternal vigilance is th' price of liberty,' he mustn't be s'prised if th' citizens see it an' pass remarks."

"Great guns!" cried Eleazer, as he proceeded to divest himself of his coat, "ye don't mean ter say I hev got sich a notice on my back do ye?"

"I reckon ye have, Ele."

But by that time Eleazer had found it, and he tore it off with a jerk.

"This is a condemned outrage!" he cried, "an' I kin lick th' man what stuck this onter me! It's a dod-pasted mean trick! That's what it is; an' I kin chaw th' ears of th' man what done it! You hear me!"

For the first time Eleazer was roused to anger.

He stretched himself up fully an inch, and looked his fiercest.

"Just show me th' galoot that done it!" he cried, "an' I'll give him a chance ter whollop me, you bet!"

The man was not forthcoming, though, and in a few moments Eleazer cooled down.

He tore the notice into minute fragments, and scattered them on the floor, remarking:

"I wonder what next?"

"Th' next thing will be a letter," his chief tormentor responded, "an' mebbey two on 'em; th' mail is 'most sorted, I reckon."

"Don't be too sartin," said Eleazer, "you may git left some time."

"Never!—nor you either. While Tryphener kin pump her breath an' sling th' pen, you'll hear from her daily."

"Tryphena be darn!"

"That's all right, Ele, but I'll bet you will marry her inside o' a week."

"What? Me? Never!"

"Ho, ho, ho! Yes you will, Ele, an' I'm willin' ter bet a fiver on it."

"I take that bet," declared Eleazer, "an' all I kin git like it!"

"You'll lose, sure."
 "Will I? Wal, I reckon I'll have somethin' ter say about it, won't I?"
 "You won't have very much ter say. I tell ye when a woman makes up her mind to a thing th' way Tryfeener has made up her mind ter have you, somethin' is goin' ter be done."
 "You see."

In a moment more the office was opened, and Eleazer received his regular letter promptly.

"That's from her, boys," cried the man just behind him.

"Who?" was the cry.
 "Tryfeener, of course. Don't ye smell th' perfume?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" the crowd laughed, and Eleazer hurried away, glad to escape.

Straight home he went, and to his room at once.

"Things is gittin' desperate," he declared, as he threw off his hat and lighted his lamp, "an' th' Lord only knows where it'll end. I wonder what she's got ter say this time?"

He sat down and began to read, but he had not read far when suddenly his face grew pale and he ejaculated:

"Great guns! she's askin' me right out p'int blank ter marry her. She is, I swear ter goodness! Now, what am I ter do? Oh, Lord! but this is jist awful!"

He read a little more, and then suddenly let the letter fall from his hands, sprung up, and began to pace the floor.

"Bless my soul!" he exclaimed. "but she is crowdin' me. She's not only asked me ter marry her, but she's actoo'ly sot th' day! Now, what am I ter do? Dear Tryphena, I wish ye was a foot an' a half shorter, I swear ter goodness! Then I'd marry ye, an' marry ye willin'ly, too: fer hang me if I don't believe I do love ye, spite o' myself!"

"Be mine, oh! be mine," ye say, 'an' I will be thine, forever, an' ever, an' ever!' That's jist where th' pinch is, Tryphena, an' you're so much th' biggest. Oh, Lord! what shall I do? Here she sot th' day fer next Friday—hangman's day!—at her house, an' at six o'clock in th' evenin', an' says I must not fail ter be there. 'Then I can eat supper with my own wifey.' Big, mighty big inducement, I swear ter goodness! but still I tremble. Hang me if I don't believe I'll skip out."

So said the letter, and a great deal more to the same effect; and it ended, as usual, with a choice bit of poetry, thus:

"Yours is not a stately name,
 But I love you just the same.
 "TRYPHENA MARKS."

CHAPTER XXIX.

ROOM NO. 22.

At an early hour one morning the town of Silver Nugget was thrown into a state of the most intense excitement.

Murder had been committed during the night!

And the victim, almost the last person any one would have guessed, was Henry Madison, the old postmaster!

Mr. Madison was always an early riser. He was usually up about as early as any one in town.

In connection with his post office duties he sold tobacco and cigars, and his place was always open early enough to accommodate the earliest caller.

His daughter usually rose an hour or so later, and got breakfast ready while he was sweeping out the office and shop, and doing other like work around.

On this morning it was noticed that the office was not opened quite as early as usual.

Several men tried the door as they passed by on their way to work, wanting to procure a supply of tobacco, but finding it fast they went on, wondering why the postmaster was later than his usual time.

Finally, about the time that Claudia was getting up, one of these callers gave the door a shake and rapped loudly with his knuckles.

He, evidently, was not disposed to go on without getting what he wanted.

"Papa!" Claudia called, opening her door, "there is some one at the door!"

She thought her father might be absent for a moment, in the cellar or rear yard.

But there was no answer.

Thinking this strange, she hurriedly put on a wrap and went down.

"Father must have overslept himself, I guess," she remarked to the customer, when she saw that her father had not been in the office at all.

As soon as the man was gone, she ran up to her father's room and knocked at the door.

No reply.

And then suddenly her eyes caught sight of some blood-stains on the door, and with a gasp of fear and horror she threw the door open.

Then scream after scream rose from her lips, and she fell fainting to the floor.

There upon the bed lay her dear father, dead, his white beard all matted with blood, and a frightful gash in his throat.

Claudia had left the outer door open, and just as she screamed so piercingly, two men entered the office.

These two men happened to be Sheriff Barkmore and Dan Gilbert.

"Good heavens!" the sheriff exclaimed, when they heard the screams, followed by the sound of some one falling heavily to the floor, "what is going on up there?"

"Somethin' is wrong, sure," declared Dan, excitedly.

"You're right!" the sheriff agreed, "and it is for us to learn what it is. Come on!"

He, the sheriff, led the way behind the counter, through a small room, out to the hall and up-stairs.

The sheriff had been through the house before, and knew its plan.

Nothing was found until he came to Mr. Madison's own room, where the horrible discovery was made.

"My God!" Barkmore gasped, "this is terrible. Who can have done the hellish deed?"

"I—I don't know," gasped Dan, who was as pale as death and was leaning against the door for support. "It is horrible."

"That does not begin to express it," Barkmore avowed. "And this explains the screams and the fall we heard. Miss Madison had just made the discovery when we entered the office."

"You're right; and I don't wonder a bit that she fainted."

"No, nor I. Come, let's lift her up and carry her into the other room."

Tenderly they lifted poor Claudia up and carried her into an adjoining room, where they laid her upon a sofa.

Barkmore proceeded to dash some water in her face at once, to bring her to, at the same time directing Dan to go and give the alarm and bring assistance.

Dan went at once, and in a moment more the news began to run through the town, and the excitement began.

Who was the murderer?

That question was upon every lip.

In a very short time assistance was brought, two women among them, who at once took charge of Claudia.

She, as fast as she could be brought out of one faint went into another, and it was feared the shock would kill her.

A doctor was sent for, and after giving her a quieting powder, he ordered her to be taken immediately to the Lawrence residence.

He knew what friends she and Lulu were; and knew that she must not remain where she was.

Accordingly, thither she was conveyed, as soon as a carriage could be got ready.

And a young man who had once acted as assistant to Mr. Madison, when Claudia was away from home, was found and put in charge of the post-office.

But the main point at issue was the fact that murder had been done, and that the murderer was at large.

It was an early hour, as stated, and before the news had spread far the local detectives were at work.

One of the most expert of these was John Barkmore, the sheriff, himself.

And he lost no time in getting to work to find a clew.

But at first no clew could be discovered, nor anything that gave promise of leading to one.

Presently, however, Barkmore found a drop of blood in the room adjoining the one in which the deed had been done, and then another and yet another, until they led him to the door opening upon the hall and stairs.

Going out, he examined the stairs carefully, and found two drops more.

In the lower hall was another, leading him toward the rear.

This, for some time, was the end of the trail.

At length, however, another drop was found right in the middle of the floor of the post-office proper, and then some marks were found on the rear window, which, by the way, was then noticed to be unfastened.

This led the search out of doors.

Under the window, on the outside, were more blood-marks, on the sill and the boards below, showing unmistakably that the murderer had escaped that way.

There again, for some minutes, the trail was lost.

Finally, though, searching further and further away, another mark of blood was found.

This time it was upon a step of the rear piazza of the Colorado House.

This hotel, it will be remembered, stood adjoining the post-office.

About the time that last tell-tale mark was discovered, Ivan Oswald, the proprietor of the hotel, came out.

"What is this I hear—Henry Madison murdered?" he cried.

"Yes," responded Barkmore, "and here is a trail of blood that has led us here. See that mark?"

"Sure enough!" the proprietor exclaimed. "Whoever it was must have run out this way, crossing the piazza as a short cut to the street."

This was so completely probable that it was accepted as the truth at once.

But nowhere else on the piazza, nor at the end where it opened upon the street, could a trace of blood be found.

This was discouraging, and Barkmore was

about giving up, when a cry from one of his men suddenly drew his attention to one of the doors of the hotel.

"What is it?" he demanded.

"Blood," was the brief reply.

Barkmore looked, and sure enough there were the marks of blood-wet fingers on the edge of the door, and also on the knob.

The sheriff looked searchingly at the proprietor.

Ivan Oswald returned his look with unwavering eyes.

"You see?" Barkmore interrogated.

"I see," the young proprietor owned.

"And do you know what it means?" the sheriff demanded severely.

"It would seem to indicate that the murderer entered my house," was the instant response.

"That is it, exactly," Barkmore assured.

"Well," pursued Oswald, "I suppose you know what to do under the circumstances, do you not?"

"It is my duty to search your house, sir," the sheriff declared.

"You are right," throwing open the door.

"Go in, you and your men, and search the house from top to bottom, thoroughly. And if you find your man, drag him forth. I harbor no criminals when I know it."

"That's the right thing to say, landlord," Barkmore complimented, "and shows you're a square man. Come on, boys, and we'll see where this trail will lead to."

The whole crowd, to the number of ten or fifteen would have followed, but the proprietor protested, so the sheriff selected two men from among them and the others were debarred.

Barely fifteen minutes had elapsed since the sheriff and Dan Gilbert had discovered the crime, and the hour being early, as stated, very few of the guests of the Colorado House were up.

"Now, landlord," remarked the sheriff, interrogatively, "where do you suppose that man can be, provided he is in the house? Where is the most likely place to find him?"

"Your questions astonish me," the proprietor half-exclaimed. "Not being a murderer myself, and having never had the acquaintance of such, I know nothing about their ways."

"Beg pardon," the sheriff said quickly, "but you didn't catch my meaning. I merely— But, no matter, we will hunt around and see what we can discover."

"That is the right thing to do. Go ahead; the house is open to you."

The searchers were the sheriff, Dan Gilbert and one other.

The Colorado House was finely furnished, all its halls and stairs being carpeted heavily, and its halls being rather dark, any stain of blood would be hard to discover.

This being the case, the sheriff produced a lamp.

All the lower main hall was examined carefully, but not a trace of the tell-tale blood could be found anywhere.

Then the sheriff led the way to the floor above.

Again he was beginning to despair of being able to follow the trail to its end.

Up one side of the hall he and his men went, and down the other, carefully scrutinizing the walls and woodwork, and especially the doors.

But nothing was found, and they were soon back to their starting-point.

Then they started along the hall in the opposite direction.

For some distance the result of their hunt here was the same as it had been in the other end.

Suddenly, though, Barkmore stooped down before a certain door and held his lamp yet more closely.

Then he motioned for Dan and the other man to look.

They did so, and nodded affirmatively.

On the white knob of this door, and also near the keyhole, were two or three stains of blood unmistakable.

The number on the door was "22."

Barkmore blew out his light, and whispering to his men to remain there until he returned, went down-stairs.

Going at once to the office, he found Ivan Oswald, and inquired:

"Who occupies Room Number 22?"

The proprietor glanced at the register, ran his finger down the page, found the number, and answered:

"That room is occupied by Robert Ransom, the sport who is called 'Rainbow Rob, the Tulip from Texas.'"

CHAPTER XXX.

RAINBOW ROB ARRESTED.

JOHN BLACKMORE staggered back as though he had received a blow in the face.

"Rainbow Rob!" he exclaimed, "it cannot be possible."

"That is his room, to a certainty," the proprietor confirmed. And then he asked:

"Why, what about Room Number 22?"

"We have traced the trail of blood to that room," the sheriff explained. "There are bloody finger-marks on the door!"

"Heavens! can this be true?"

"It is just as I tell you."

"It does not seem possible that that young sport can be a murderer, and I hope he can easily brush away the suspicion."

"That is the way I look at it, too, and I hope he can easily clear himself."

"Well," Oswald questioned, "what are you going to do? Will you rouse him up, or will you wait till he comes down?"

"I shall rouse him up. And, friend Oswald, I want to mention this: If Rainbow Rob is now in that room, and responds to my knock, I shall believe him innocent, no matter what the proof is. If he is *not* there, then it will look bad for him. That fellow is no fool, and he would never leave such a trail behind him. I mention this confidentially, as my own personal opinion. If there is proof, of course I shall have to arrest the man."

"I will not speak of it. And let me warn you that if you want to arrest Rainbow Rob, you will have to be almighty quick in doing it, if he is inclined to resist. He is lightning, I am told."

"He is, for a fact. I hope I won't have to do it, though."

With these words the sheriff left the office and went back up-stairs.

"Whose room is it?" asked Dan Gilbert.

"Rainbow Rob's."

"The deuce ye say!"

"So the landlord says."

"I think ye'll have ter excuse me, then, sheriff, really. Ther Tulip an' I is pretty good friends, an' I'd hate ter be present at his arrest."

Dan was backing away as he spoke, but the sheriff, with a revolver, motioned him to stop.

"No you don't," he whispered, "I want you here. You've witnessed this thing so far with me, and I want you to see it out."

Dan looked very much as though he would like to get away, but he decided to remain.

The sheriff had the best of the bargain, by long odds.

Seeing that his revolver was in order, Barkmore knocked against the door with it.

"Hello! hello, citizen!" cried the well-known voice of Tulip from Texas, "what is wanted?"

"I want a word with you," Barkmore responded. "Open the door."

"Who are you?" Rob asked.

"I am Sheriff Barkmore."

"Oh! is that you, sheriff? Good-morning! Just a moment and I'll let you in."

"All right," returned the sheriff, and then taking a firm hold upon the handle of his revolver, he waited for the door to open.

In a moment it was flung open wide, and Rainbow Rob stood before them.

The sheriff was all ready, and had the sport covered with his revolver instantly.

"Don't move your hands," he ordered, "or I'll have to drop you. I want to ask you a few questions."

"Well, this is something of a surprise-party, gentlemen, I assure you," said the sport, smiling; "and as you hold the best hand, I suppose I'll have to do as you say. Come in and sit down, gentlemen, and then ask all the questions you want to."

Rob's manner was perfectly free and easy, and if he felt any alarm, he certainly did not show it.

"No, I do not care to sit down," the sheriff answered. "I am here on business."

"So it seems. May I inquire what your business is?"

"Are you aware that murder has been done in this town?"

"I am not," Rob replied, his face becoming more serious.

"Such is the fact."

"Who has been killed?"

"Henry Madison, the postmaster."

"My God!" Rob exclaimed, "you do not mean to say he is dead—murdered, do you?"

As he uttered the words, his face turned pale.

"It is just as I tell you," the sheriff assured.

"Henry Madison was murdered in the night, and the crime was discovered a short time ago, first by his daughter and then by me and Dan Gilbert."

"And what brings you to me?" Rob inquired.

"We suspect you of knowing something about the deed."

"You suspect me! Why, you must be crazy, are you not?"

"No, sir, we are *not* crazy."

"Then what has led you to suspect me of possessing some knowledge concerning the crime?"

"I will tell you in few words. Half an hour ago, or less, I stepped into the post-office to get some cigars. Dan Gilbert here entered at the same time. We both noticed that the postmaster was not up as early as usual, and there was no one there. At the same moment we heard two or three loud screams up-stairs, and then heard somebody fall to the floor. We rushed up at once, and discovered the crime. Claudia Madison lay on the floor in a faint, and her father was lying on the bed, cold in death, with a terrible gash cut in his throat."

"Heavens! but this is horrible!" Rainbow Rob exclaimed.

"We got assistance as soon as possible," the sheriff went on, "and turning the house over to them, I and Dan and some others set to work to hunt up a clew to the crime. Presently we found drops of blood on the floor, and following the trail carefully we discovered where the murderer had entered and left the building. Then we went out and followed it further. It led us to a rear door of this hotel. We entered. We followed it further still, and it led us to this room."

"To this room!"

"Exactly. See there, the stains upon the door?"

"My God! am I awake, or dreaming? And do you arrest me?"

"I do. Robert Ransom, I arrest you in the name of the law, charging you with the murder of Henry Madison. Not only is there blood on the door of your room, but on the sleeve of your shirt as well."

Sure enough, there upon the sleeve of the young man's right arm, blood-marks were plainly visible.

Rainbow Rob sunk down upon a chair, for the moment completely overcome.

"I am innocent of the crime," he declared, "as innocent as a child unborn. There is a mystery about it all that I cannot understand."

Seeing that the young man offered no resistance, when told of his arrest, the sheriff produced a pair of handcuffs and stepped toward him, with the intention of putting them on him.

Rob glanced up, a gleam of fire came to his eyes, and he said:

"No handcuffs for me, sheriff, if you please! I submit to my arrest quietly enough, and you will have no need for them. I am unarmed; there hang my weapons in my belt. Do you want me to go with you to the lockup?"

"Yes, certainly. You must admit that appearances are strong enough against you to warrant your arrest."

"They certainly are, from what you have told me."

"And I have told the simple truth."

"Very well; I take your word for it."

"And you will come with me peacefully to the jail?"

"Yes; I give you my word for that. You take charge of my belt and arms there, and you, Dan, bring along my gripsack."

"All right," said Dan, as he grasped the grip, while the sheriff took charge of the belt of weapons as requested.

"And you will permit me to finish dressing, sheriff?" Bob remarked, in a questioning tone.

"Yes, certainly," was the answer; "go ahead and do so."

Rob did, and in a few minutes he was ready to go.

"Now I am ready to accompany you," he announced; "but I have a favor to ask."

"What is it?" the sheriff inquired.

"Are you disposed to grant a reasonable favor?"

"Yes, if I can."

"Very well, I will tell you what I want. In the first place, I want you to keep my arrest a secret until you have lodged me in jail. I have no desire to be gaped at by the crowd as a murderer. I will go with you quietly."

"All right; I am willing to agree to that. You hear, boys?" he said to Dan and the other man.

They answered that they understood.

"Don't forget that I am armed, though," the sheriff cautioned.

"You will have no need for your arms, so far as I am concerned," Rob assured.

"I hope not, anyhow. Is that all the favor you have to ask?"

"No, I have one other, and this is *the* favor."

"Well, name it."

"I want you to conduct me at once to the place where Mr. Madison was killed, and as we go I want you to point out the trail of blood that led you to my door. Will you do this?"

It was a request that surprised the sheriff and his aides not a little.

What could be the cool sport's object?

But he, the sheriff, was inclined to favor the prisoner, since, as we have seen, he believed him innocent of the awful crime.

"Yes," he answered, after a momentary pause, "I will. Come on."

"All right, and greatly obliged to you. And now if you will allow Dan or your other man to go right on to the jail with my grip, it will cause no remark when I start in that direction with you."

"Very well, I'll do that, too. Here, Dan, you give the grip to Dick, and he can take it right down. I want you to stay with me as witness."

"You might put the belt and weapons right in it," Rainbow Rob suggested. "Shall I open it and let you do so?"

"That's a good idea. It will save me the trouble of carrying them. Yes, open the grip and I'll put them in."

Rob unlocked the gripsack and Barkmore put the weapons into it, and also some few other articles which otherwise would have been forgotten.

Then the man called Dick took charge of it and set out.

The sheriff, Rob and Dan then proceeded down-stairs and out upon the rear piazza.

There they encountered Ivan Oswald, who was walking up and down and smoking a cigar.

"What!" he exclaimed, "you have made an arrest, sheriff?"

Rainbow Rob was the one to answer.

"Yes," he said, "he has made an arrest, landlord, but please do not let it be known at present."

"No," the sheriff added, "say nothing until after the prisoner is locked up. He has requested me to keep it secret until then."

"All right," Oswald agreed, "I shall not let it out."

"I'm sorry to leave your house, Mr. Oswald," the Tulip remarked, "but our friend the sheriff has invited me to put up at his hotel, and will not hear to my declining. My room here is paid for for some days to come, so you may retain it for me. I may not make a long stay with the sheriff."

"I certainly hope you will not, at any rate," the proprietor responded, "for I cannot believe you guilty of the crime. I will hold your room."

Rob thanked him, and then gave his attention to the sheriff.

CHAPTER XXXI.

RAINBOW ROB AT WORK.

SHERIFF BARKMORE, according to his promise, pointed out to Rainbow Rob the trail of blood.

First he pointed out the stains upon the rear door of the hotel, then upon the piazza, and then led him to the post-office window.

Ivan Oswald watched these proceedings with no little surprise.

It was something new to see a prisoner doing detective work.

"Barkmore plainly shows that he does believe him innocent, as he declared he should if he found him in his room," he mused.

At the post-office window Rainbow Rob examined the blood-stains critically.

And his attention was particularly drawn to one upon the front edge of the outside sill.

There, in the now hardened blood, was a perfect impression of the ball of a human thumb. Every line of the skin could be plainly seen, circling from a common center as the lines on the thumb do, and right across the center was one straight line, a little deeper than the others, showing what was evidently the scar of a cut.

This was something Barkmore and his men had overlooked.

Nor did they see it now—as Rainbow Rob saw it.

In fact, the latter did his best not to draw their attention to it.

"Have you a knife handy?" he asked of the sheriff.

"Yes," was the response; "do you want it?"

"A moment, if you please."

Barkmore handed his knife to the sport, and Rob, with a quick motion, cut a deep shaving from the sill.

On that shaving, or splint—as it was more properly, was the mark of the thumb.

"Now, sheriff," Rob said, as he gave back the knife, "I want you to put a mark on this sliver of wood, so that you can identify it at any time. It may be the means for bringing the real murderer to justice."

"All right, I'll do it, and willingly," the sheriff consented.

"Handle it carefully," Rob cautioned.

"All right; I think I see the point now, and I'll not touch the mark."

It was now evident to the others that some clew had been found in one of the stains of blood.

Barkmore took the sliver of wood and cut two little nicks in one side of it, calling Dan Gilbert's attention to them.

"All right," said Dan, "I see 'em."

"Well, remember them," the sheriff enjoined, "and remember where this piece of wood came from."

"Yes, do not forget that you saw me cut it from here," supplemented Rob.

And Ivan Oswald, as he watched these proceedings from where he stood on the hotel stoop, wondered what was going on.

Rainbow Rob put the piece of wood in his pocket, and then the sheriff led the way into the house.

Here he showed the blood-marks he had followed, as they went through the hall and up-stairs, and then they entered the room where Mr. Madison's body lay.

The coroner had been summoned, and had just arrived.

"My God! but this is horrible!" Rob gasped, as he gazed upon the victim of the heinous deed.

"It is indeed," the coroner agreed. "And it is well for the murderer that he has escaped," he added, "for our postmaster was almost loved by the citizens here, and if he were arrested he would be in danger of being lynched."

Rainbow Rob gave the sheriff a meaning glance, as he responded:

"I believe you are right," he said. "But, it is not safe to jump too hastily to a conclusion, no matter how strong the proof at first sight. Many an innocent man has been lynched upon mere suspicion."

"Yes, yes, you are right, and I hope the law will have its own proper course in this case."

"I hope so, too," the sheriff added.

"Has any clew been discovered?" the coroner inquired.

"I have a slight one," the sheriff replied, promptly. "I shall follow it at once and see what it amounts to."

"What is it?"

"That I prefer not to tell, now. I will give you all the points I can at the inquest, however."

"Very well; that will be a more proper time for me to inquire."

"Where is Miss Madison?" Rob suddenly asked, as his thoughts flew to her.

He was told, and could not help feeling a high regard for the doctor who had ordered her taken there.

And then his thoughts turned to pretty Lulu Lawrence.

What would her thoughts be when the news of his arrest for the murder of the father of her dearest friend should reach her?

He dared not allow the thought to dwell in his mind.

After remaining in the room for some minutes, during which time Rob's eyes were everywhere in search of some further clew, but without finding any, he gave a signal to Barkmore that he was ready to go.

The two passed down-stairs and out, followed by Dan Gilbert.

They went out the rear way, and then across the rear piazza of the hotel to the street on that side.

Quite a crowd had now collected in front of the house, and the sheriff wanted to avoid it as much as possible.

He was as anxious to get his prisoner to the jail before his arrest became known, as Rob was himself, though for a different reason, perhaps.

Rainbow Rob did not want to be seen, publicly, under arrest just then; and the sheriff did not want to have it known that he was under arrest, for fear of the crowd.

In due time they arrived at the jail, and the sport was placed in a cell.

"Anything I can do for you?" Barkmore inquired.

"Haven't you done enough?" queried Rob, with a smile.

"I have only done what my office forces me to do," was the answer. "Personally, I believe you are innocent."

"Do you mean that?"

"I do."

"Then I have not guessed wrong. I thought from your lenity toward me that you did not believe me guilty of such a crime as murder."

"You guessed aright. But, how are you to explain away the trail of blood leading to your door, and the fact that there is blood upon your sleeve?"

"I cannot explain it away until I get upon the track of the murderer. All I can say now is, there was no blood on my sleeve when I retired to bed last night, and I do not know how it came there."

"It is a strange affair. But, is there no errand I can perform for you? Is there any person you would like to see?"

"Yes, there is one person I desire to see, and I would like to have him come as soon as he can."

"Who is it?"

"Alvin Howe, the telegraph operator."

"All right, I will hunt him up and send him here as soon as possible."

The sheriff went away, then, Dan Gilbert with him, and then ere long it became known that Rainbow Rob, the Tulip from Texas, had been arrested as the murderer of Henry Madison.

If the town had been thrown into a state of excitement when the crime became known, that excitement reached its climax when this latter report was circulated.

At first no one would believe it.

An hour after the crime was discovered the whole town was in an uproar.

Judge Lawrence, as soon as Claudia Madison was brought to his house, and he learned of her father's sad end, left the house at once and went to the scene of the crime.

He arrived there a few minutes after Rainbow Rob and the sheriff had gone, and he was there when the news of Rob's arrest reached him.

He was struck speechless for the moment.

"Where is Barkmore?" he presently demanded.

Just then the sheriff entered.

"Here I am," he responded.

"I hear you have made an arrest," the judge said severely.

"Yes, so I have."

"You have arrested Robert Ransom, a most estimable young man."

"I have."

"May I inquire why?"

The sheriff explained, and the face of Judge Lawrence turned pale as he silently listened.

"The evidence is damning," he finally admitted, "but I do not believe the young man is guilty. Nothing short of a confession from him will make me believe it. I shall go and see him at once."

And he did.

Within half an hour he had seen Rob, and would then have staked his very life upon his innocence.

True to his word, Sheriff Barkmore sent word to Alvin Howe what had taken place, and as soon as he possibly could do so the young railroad man called at the jail.

"My God! Rob!" he exclaimed, "what is the meaning of this?"

"Circumstantial evidence," Rob replied.

"But, can you not refute the charge, and get out of here?"

"No, not at present. The evidence that led to my arrest is powerful."

"But you are in no danger!"

"No, not the least. I could demand my release, if— But you will learn of that later. As it is, I must content myself to remain here for a few days."

"And what do you want me to do for you?"

"In the first place I want you to get a brief note to Martin McDonald, the New York detective."

"Ha! you have found him out?"

"Yes."

"But how can I find him?"

"I will tell you presently."

"Oh! all right."

"And next, I want you to send some telegrams for me. Have you paper and pencil handy?"

"Yes, I have both."

"Let me take them then, and I will write what I desire to say. Perhaps you are in a hurry though."

"No, I am in no hurry, so take your time."

Rainbow Rob proceeded then to write the note for Detective McDonald, and then some telegrams.

"Now," he said, when he had done, "here is first the note for McDonald. Give it to —," mentioning a name in a low tone, "and be sure it falls into no other hands."

"What!" exclaimed Howe, "is he the detective?"

Rob smiled, but did not confirm the suspicion by admitting it otherwise.

"Do not mention your suspicions," he said.

And then he added:

"Here are the telegrams. Please rush them forward as soon as you get back to your office."

"I will do so."

"Have you seen Claudia?"

"Yes; I went to the Lawrence residence before I came here."

"How is she?"

"She was then conscious, but the doctor was still there with her. Poor girl! it was a terrible shock to her."

"And Lulu— Had she yet heard of my arrest?"

"She learned of it while I was there, and with a scream she fainted dead away."

"Poor girl! I am sorry, and yet it gives me joy to hear these words."

In a short time Howe went away, and soon afterward Lulu Lawrence called at the jail, alone, and spent half an hour in Rob's company.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A PRISONER ESCAPES.

Two or three days passed.

Rainbow Rob was still in the toils, but his case had not by any means remained idle.

He had received a reply to his note to Martin McDonald, in which the detective promised to carry out certain plans which he, Rob, had suggested.

And, too, he had received answers to his telegrams.

In the forenoon of the day to which we have now moved forward, Henry Madison was buried.

The funeral was a large one, and his daughter Claudia, though almost crazed with grief, had so far recovered from her shock as to be able to attend, in company with Lulu Lawrence.

But, she would not return to the house where the crime had been done.

Miss Lawrence sent a servant, therefore, to take charge of it, and the young man we have mentioned before remained in the post-office.

For the present Claudia determined to remain at the Lawrence residence.

And in the afternoon of the same day the inquest was held.

It was not of long duration.

And the evidence against Rainbow Rob was so strong that the coroner's jury could do nothing but sustain the charge and remand him to jail.

Rob had no defense whatever save his statement that he had retired to bed at a certain hour, was not out of his room after that, and did not know how the blood-stains had come upon his sleeves.

Another point against him was the fact that a

blood-stained knife had been found in the chimney-hole in Room Number 22.

The town was about equally divided in its opinion of his innocence or guilt.

The fact that he was an entire stranger there went against him not a little.

Early in the evening there was a call made at the jail by a man whom we have met; namely, the Spot Saint from Scarecrow.

He was clad the same as ever, and still carried his ungainly-looking carpet-bag.

"What do you want?" the jailer demanded, when he presented himself at the door.

"I have come to see that young murderer," the Spot Saint answered.

"What d'ye want to see him for?"

"I want to urge upon him to confess his crimes and repent. Especially repent. And I have some tracts that fit his case admirably."

"Well, you can't come in, so you had better make tracks and take yourself off."

"Oh! but I must come in, my good man. I am engaged in a good work, and you should be only too glad of the opportunity to render me some assistance."

"Mebby I should, Mr. Scarecrow, but I ain't, and that makes a difference. You can't come in, and that settles it."

"Oh! thou blind sinner! repent."

"Nary; you've heard my say, so now git."

"Won't you give me just five minutes with the prisoner, if no longer?" the Spot Saint urged.

"No," was the answer, "nor one minute. The prisoner don't want to see ye."

"I'll bet he'll say let me in, if you tell him who I am."

"I'll bet he won't, then. He'd say fire you out."

"I will give you a dollar if you will go and ask him, and you may give me one if he says no."

"That's about the same as a bet."

"Well, call it that if you want to."

"Well, just to get rid of you I will ask him."

"And if he should say let me in, then will you do so?"

"Yes, if he says let you in, in you shall come."

"Thanks, my Christian friend; many, many thanks. You are not wholly bad."

The jailer went at once to Rainbow Rob's cell, and said:

"There's a critter out here wants to see you."

"Who is it?" Rob inquired.

"It is that crank the boys call the 'Spot Saint.' Shall I fire him?"

"What does he want?"

"Oh! he wants to talk repent to you, and give you some tracts."

"Well, let him come. I guess I can stand it, and it will help to pass away time. Yes, let him come."

"All right, it's your funeral."

Back then the jailer went to the door.

"Well," the Spot Saint inquired, "what does he say?"

"He says let you come. He is awful lonesome, I reckon, and wants to be amused."

"Ah! I am glad to hear this. It shows that his conscience troubles him, and that he wants to repent. Show me in."

Visitors were allowed at that early hour anyhow, and the jailer had really no right to bar the Saint out.

He opened the door and led the way to the cell Rob occupied, and allowed him to enter.

"Repent, oh sinner, repent repent!" the Spot Saint exclaimed, as he stepped in.

"Do you think I am guilty, then, my good sir?" Rob asked.

"It certainly looks that way," the Saint declared; "and I have come to talk with you about the uncertainty of life and the certainty of death, and so forth, and to give you a few choice tracts. I—"

"Say," the jailer interrupted, "when you want to get out, rattle the door."

"All right, friend, all right," said the Saint, "I will do so." And then he went right on exhorting to Rob.

As soon as the jailer was gone, though, the Saint's manner changed suddenly.

He kept right on talking, but at the same time he began to disrobe.

He threw off his hat, his big coat, his boots and his trowsers, and Rainbow Rob began at once to put them on, right over his own clothes.

It was soon done, and the Spot Saint was left with nothing save his shirt, drawers and socks.

Then he, the Spot Saint, opened his carpet-bag and took out a false beard that was very like his natural one, and assisted Rob to adjust it to his face, talking constantly the while.

When this was done, however, then Rob began to talk, imitating the Spot Saint's voice and style almost exactly.

And while he talked he proceeded to bind the Saint securely, hands and feet. And then he put a gag into his mouth and laid him on the narrow bed.

And still he continued to talk, that any one listening would have taken it to be the Spot Saint himself.

All this had occupied ten minutes, perhaps, and when it was done the now disguised sport

sat down on the foot of the little bed and held quite a conversation with himself.

That is, he talked in two voices; in imitation of the Saint and in his own natural tone.

After about ten minutes more he rose up and shook the door, a signal for the jailer to come.

And when he was heard approaching, he made the parting remarks to the supposed prisoner:

"Good-night, my young friend; I will call again. I am glad to have found you in so meek and repentant a state. Be of good cheer, and above all things else, *repent*."

"Did you rattle the door?" the jailer inquired.

"Yes," the new Spot Saint answered, "I did. My work here is done. The murderer has repented, and is now in tears. I am ready to go."

Had the jailer proved inquisitive, and made a move toward entering the cell, or spoken to the prisoner, Rob was ready to make a prisoner of him; but he did neither.

He took the situation just as it appeared on its face, opened the door and allowed the new Saint to pass out, and then locked it again.

Rob had the Saint's carpet-bag with him, and as soon as the jailer had locked the cell door he followed him to the jail office.

"The prisoner says he has a gripsack here somewhere," he, Rob, remarked, "and he has asked me to take charge of it for him. Will you please deliver it to me?"

"Well, I don't know about that," replied the jailer, as he meditated. "I suppose as it's his, though," he decided, "he has the right to do what he pleases with it, so you can have it. Here it is," and he pulled it out from under a table and delivered it.

"Thank you," said Rob, "thank you. Allow me to give you a tract." And opening the carpet-bag, he handed the jailer one of the Spot Saint's valued supply.

The jailer took it, mechanically, and then the sport bade him good-night and went away.

At the first corner he turned, and finding a dark place between two houses, stopped there and quickly threw off the Spot Saint's garments, even to the boots, having brought his own with him in the deep pockets of the great coat. He had also brought his hat, in the bottom of the carpet-bag.

The change being made, with the exception of the white beard, which he still retained, he rolled the Spot Saint's garments up, tied them securely, and bound them and the old carpet-bag together, and then walked boldly back to the jail.

First, however, he had opened his grip and put on his belt of weapons.

The jail was a little out of the busy part of the town, and the risk the sport ran was not worth considering.

Arriving there, he laid the Spot Saint's things down on the steps, knocked loudly at the door with his revolver, and then took a hasty departure from the town.

Hearing such an unusual knock, the jailer hastened to the door and opened it.

Imagine his surprise. There on the steps lay the bundle, but no one was in sight.

Picking the bundle up, he carried it in, and then instantly he recognized the carpet-bag and the coat.

He was wild!

With a volley of "cuss words," he caught up a lamp and rushed into the jail proper, and to Rainbow Rob's cell.

There lay the Spot Saint on the bed, minus his clothes, and his hands and feet bound and his mouth gagged.

"Curse you!" the jailer cried. "This was a put-up job!"

The Saint rolled his head from side to side in the negative, as he could protest in no other way his innocence.

"I don't believe ye!" the enraged jailer exclaimed, as he proceeded to liberate him. "It was a put-up job, an' you'll suffer for it, too!"

"No, no, my honest friend, you wrong me—you do, indeed," the Spot Saint earnestly declared, as soon as the gag was removed. "The young lion, that he is, sprung upon me, gagged me, tore off my clothes, and then bound me as you found me."

"Impossible! I heard you talking all the time."

"That was not I, but he. He is the most wonderful imitator I ever heard. But do not stand here and argue with me. Sound the alarm. Recapture him! Bring him back! The rascal has my clothes, my carpet-bag, and all my traps! Sound the alarm, I say, and let the whole town turn out and hunt for him!"

This was a rare case, and the jailer flung the cell door to and locked it, and then ran and rung the jail bell with might and main.

Within ten minutes the news spread, and the town was once more thrown into a fever of intense excitement.

Parties set out at once to hunt for the daring young prisoner, but, needless to add, he was not recovered.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A PRETTY PAIR OF ROGUES.

WHETHER or not Sheriff Barkmores had any previous knowledge of this well-planned escape, we will not attempt to learn.

Certain it was, though, that while he made every effort to recover the escaped prisoner, he promptly accepted the story told by the Spot Saint, and ordered him released.

And, as stated, Rainbow Rob was not retaken.

Those who had condemned him pointed to this as positive proof of his guilt, while those who had believed him innocent before were none the less confident of his innocence now.

In good time, they declared, the real murderer would be found, and the crime placed where it rightly belonged.

But we must give our attention now to other points.

In the afternoon of the day following the escape, a Friday, Ivan Oswald was returning to Silver Nugget from a town some miles north, when he was suddenly brought to a stop by this command:

"Hands up!"

There beside the road, mounted upon his coal-black steed, was—Sulphur Sam.

Taken completely by surprise, Oswald lost no time in obeying the order.

"Sorry to trouble you," the outlaw remarked, half apologetically, "but business is business, and my business is to make a haul when I can. Allow me to relieve you of your weapons first."

As he spoke, Sulphur Sam deftly took the traveler's revolver from his pocket, and then ran his hand over him to see if he had another, at the same time taking care to hold "the drop" on him.

One revolver was all Ivan had, though, and that gone he was disarmed.

"It seems to me I have met you before," Sam remarked, as he looked at Ivan more closely, then. "May I inquire who you are?"

"I am Ivan Oswald, proprietor of the Colorado House at Silver Nugget, sir; and you shall pay dearly for this, you rascal!"

"Ha, ha, ha! just what they all say, every time, and I haven't paid the score yet. But, your voice sounds as familiar as your face looks. Where can I have met you? Have I ever had the honor to hold you up on the road before?"

"No, sir; you have not."

"Well, well, it is strange, for I am usually good at remembering faces and places. But this is not business. With your permission, sir"—and as he spoke, he threw open the traveler's coat and thrust his hand into a pocket.

There was nothing there save a letter, but the outlaw drew that forth, with another caution to his victim to keep his hands well up.

The moment Sulphur Sam glanced at the envelope, though, and saw what was written on it, he uttered an exclamation of surprise.

That envelope was addressed to Miss Lulu Lawrence, and was the one Ivan Oswald had stolen from her pocket.

With perfect coolness, the highwayman drew forth the sheet the envelope contained, and read it.

"By heavens!" he exclaimed, "but this is decidedly interesting. How came this in your possession?"

"None of your business!" Ivan retorted. "Go through me, if you are bent on doing it, and let me pass on."

"Do not be in a hurry; I want to ask you a few questions."

"I won't answer any."

"Oh, yes you will! In the first place, is the real name of Sulphur Sam known at Silver Nugget?"

"It is."

"What is it?"

"It is said to be Samuel Dunton."

"Just as I expected, curse my stupidity! Yes, that is my name. And now look at this."

As he spoke, the outlaw drew from his pocket the letter he had received at the post-office, and held it up to view.

"You will notice that the envelope is the same as this," also holding up the one he had just taken from Ivan's pocket, "and that the writing is the same; and the contents, I assure you, are the same exactly."

"Is it possible?"

"It is. And now I would like to inquire how you stand in the mystery."

"I shall not tell that."

"I think you will. I know you now, my man, even though you do sport a beard. Perhaps you have forgotten that bank affair down in Texas."

Ivan Oswald's face turned deathly pale, and he gasped.

"Who are you?"

The outlaw laughed.

"I thought I should be able to recognize you," he said. "Do you remember 'Sam Slater,' as I was then known, and who knew you then as 'Bob Brauer'?"

Oswald's face was now perfectly livid.

"Are you Sam Slater?" he inquired.

"That is one of the numerous names I have owned in my time, Bob. Ha! ha! ha! I guess we understand each other now. But you have been getting up in the world, it seems."

"This is no place to talk," Oswald growled.

"Well, come with me, and then we will find a place. You needn't hold your hands up any longer. Old pardes ought to be able to trust each other."

Directing Oswald which way to go, Sulphur Sam followed close behind, and in a few minutes they were in a secluded spot, sheltered by rocks and trees, quite a distance from the trail, or road.

"Here we can dismount," the outlaw observed, suiting action to the words, "and have a quiet talk. Come, down with you, Bob, for I have many questions to put to you."

Oswald obeyed, with an ill grace, and at the further invitation of his generous host sat down on the trunk of a fallen tree.

"Go ahead," he said, "and ask all the questions you want to. I will answer them."

"You don't seem to be overjoyed at meeting an old friend. We will understand each other better presently, I guess. Now, to begin with, I want to know all that you know about these mysterious notices and the silver casket. Go ahead, now, and talk straight."

"No, I am not overjoyed to see you, decidedly," Ivan frankly declared, "and I want to cut our interview as short as possible. I—"

"Ashamed of me, eh? Well, now look here, Bob, or whatever your name is, I shall stick to you like a brother, and you shall share your good luck with me. If you kick— Well, I know how to bring you to terms, I guess."

While he was speaking, the outlaw threw aside his mask, and the two men glared at each other.

"Go ahead, now," Sam ordered, "and let me into the secret of this mysterious silver casket business."

Having no choice, Oswald did as he was told, but did not by any means tell the story in full.

This was suspected, though, and by a series of sharp questions and stern threats Sulphur Sam soon brought it out in full.

"By heavens!" he exclaimed, "this is wonderful. And it seems that we are to be barred out of any wealth it might bring us. You, because you are not an heir; and I, because I dare not appear and claim my share. Fool! fool that I was! when I applied for this letter as Sulphur Sam."

For a moment neither spoke, and then of a sudden the outlaw sprang to his feet and exclaimed:

"I have it!"

"You have what?" Oswald demanded.

"I have a plan whereby we can come in for a share of this prize!"

"You have?"

"Yes."

"And what is it?"

"We must marry those two girls, and do it before the second day of October, too."

"Just what I have been trying to do, to marry one of them; but the plan failed."

"We must force them to marry us."

"Impossible!"

"No, it is not. It is possible. We must abduct them, and after they have been in our hands for a few days they will be glad enough to marry us."

"But it is a dangerous game for us to undertake."

"Look at the prize, though, if we win! We will each have a double share in the silver casket, and a pretty wife as well. You see it is worth risking something for."

"I know it is, but, how is it to be done?"

"Well, let me see. You say the old postmaster is dead, murdered, and that Rainbow Rob was arrested for the crime, but has escaped."

"Yes, so I said."

"And you say that this Rainbow Rob and Lulu Lawrence have got to be firm friends, if not in fact lovers; and that neither she nor Claudia Madison believes him guilty of the crime."

"Exactly."

"Such being the case, suppose those girls were to receive a letter purporting to come from Rainbow Rob, asking them to steal out of town and meet him at a given point, and stating that he had something of the utmost importance to say to them; would they go to meet him?"

"They would, beyond a doubt."

"Then can we not write just such a letter and decoy them into our power?"

"Yes, we can do it, but look at the risk!"

"The risk be hanged! Once we get them in our power, we will marry them in spite of themselves. Then they will be in our power with a vengeance, and we can make them do our bidding. If there is any wealth forthcoming, we will manage to get it, and then light out for some foreign land. Will you do it?"

"By heavens, I dare not!"

"Nonsense! It is the only way you can hope to get a slice of the pie, and the only way I can hope to get my share. We must do it!"

"If I thought it would work, I—"

"See here, Bob, you shall do it! It is make or lose, and if you won't go in with me, I swear I'll expose that Texas job and show you up."

"Would you do that?"

"I would, I swear it."

"But you would only run into the same danger yourself."

"Ha, ha, ha! I see you have partly forgotten Sam Slater, and that you do not know Sulphur Sam at all! You are in my power, Bob Brace, or whatever your new name is, and now you may take your choice. Are you with me or not?"

"Well, I am with you. We will go into the game, and either make or break. But there is one question to be decided here and now, to save any misunderstanding."

"What is that?"

"It is simply—which of the two girls do you prefer?"

"The little postmistress, by long odds."

"Good enough! My choice is the other, and so we are both suited. You are mistaken, though, in saying we will each get a double share of the prize, whatever it is. Our portions will be increased, by the absence of one of the heirs, but not doubled. As I understand the thing now, each is to receive an equal share, whatever it is. So, you see, we are evenly fixed—if we win."

"And we *will* win. Our plan is perfect, and it cannot miscarry. Here is my hand, Bob, to bind the compact."

"Well, and here is mine, since we are in for it. It is win all or lose all, with me."

The two shook hands, and then after some further conversation, in which they arranged for another meeting, Sulphur Sam returned Oswald's revolver and the letter he had taken, and they parted company and went their ways.

A few minutes later a young man sprung up from behind a rock where he had been lying, shook his fist after the rascally pair, and muttered:

"Just count me into the game, if you please!"

That young man was—Rainbow Rob, the Tulip from Texas.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

ELEAZER VS. TRYPHENA.

AND this was the Friday—the hangman's day, as Eleazer Brown had commented—that Tryphena Marks had set for her wedding-day.

She had not yet won Eleazer's consent, but evidently took it for granted and as a matter of course.

Had she not made love enough to soften the heart of a man of stone?

Ay, verily, as Eleazer actually put it; and his head, too.

Since the letter in which the fair maid had clearly set forth her intentions, Eleazer had received two letters daily; and on this Friday he received three, and all in the forenoon and by special messenger.

The facilities of the U. S. mail were no longer adequate to the requirements of that tortured heart.

In the afternoon Eleazer did not go to work.

Tryphena soon learned of this, and regarded it as a good omen, on the strength of which she began at once to prepare for the great event.

But Eleazer had other thoughts.

His intention was to slip quietly out of town and put an end to the whole affair.

Tryphena's numerous letters had, in fact, almost driven him to suicide.

And her bursts of poetry!—Well, we will set forth a few samples and let it speak for itself.

Every letter was sweet with "perfume," as Eleazer called it: gorgeous with forget-me-nots, or "posies," and finished with a soulful burst of true poetry.

One ended thus:

"A bird in hand is plainly seen;
Who then would hunt the bush, is green!"

"I don't know nothin' about *Green*," was Eleazer's comment, "but *Brown* don't purpose ter be taken in by any sich stuff!"

Another choice bit ran as follows:

"Are you weary of earth's strife?
Tryphena Marks will be your wife!"

"If that would settle it, Tryphena," was the backward lover's remark as he read, "I swear ter goodness I'd take ye; but I'm 'fraid 'earth's strife' would then begin."

Another letter ended like this:

"Links of love we make each day;
Let us weld the chain to stay."

"Tryphena," Eleazer exclaimed, when he had mastered this, "if you only knowed what a horror I have to chains in general, and of matrimonial chains in p'tic'lar, you wouldn't 'a' made that poem? Th' diffikilty with *them* chains is, they're bound ter stay."

Another ended thus:

"Like a river's tameless flood,
Is the love that stirs the blood;
And like the river seeks the sea,
So seeks my breaking heart for thee."

"That's a good one, Tryphena, I swear to goodness it is!" cried Eleazer. "It ends just a trifle sad, though. Leastwise it sort o' makes me feel sad, ter think o' that 'breakin' heart, o' yours. It ain't only yer heart that's a-seekin' me, though, Tryphena, it's yer body as well; an' I hear ye actually do stand six feet two in yer socks. Poor heart! I fear it'll have ter bust."

There were many more little bursts of poetry of a similar sort, all duly commented on when read by their recipient, but with one more specimen we will drop them all.

At the close of the last letter received on this Friday, was the following, and, as Eleazer said of it, it was the most beautiful of all.

"How have you heart to treat me so,
And make my tears unceasing flow?
Love me little, love me long,
Is the burden of my song!
Though you are short and I am tall,
Do not, I pray, mind that at all;
But come and let me be your wife,
And I will love you all my life.
Go, little missive, seek my king,
And bid him buy the wedding-ring!"

"TRYPHENA MARKS."

"Now, Tryphena," mused Eleazer as he read, "that is what I call real touchin'. It is, I swear ter goodness! You've got it bad, an' no mistake. I don't believe any female critter ever had it badder. But that's no reason why ye should pitch it up ter me that I'm small, not by no means. 'Love me, little,' ye say. Of course I'm little; I know that as well as you do. If I was nearer yer own size ye wouldn't have ter ax me but once to marry ye, I tell ye! An' 'love me long,' ye add, as if a feller could love ye short if he wanted ter! When ye speak of my bein' th' cause o' yer salt, sad tears a-flowin' unceasin', though, then ye hit me right whar I live. I feel fer ye, I swear ter goodness! but what kin I do? I wish th' 'burden of yer song' wasn't so sad. As ter not mindin' it 'cause I'm short an' you're tall, I can't help it. I don't s'pose you mind it, 'cause you've got th' 'vantage: an' if we could change sizes, I wouldn't mind, nuther. But when ye git right down ter biz, an' say come and let ye be my wife, and talk about th' ring, an' so on, then ye remind me that I'm in a condemned tight place, an' that I'd better git. I love ye, Tryphena, an' it is hard ter tear myself away; but when I reflect how big ye be, an' how little I—Wal, I simply daren't, an' that settles it. I wonder what's th' next train fer Denver?"

And so, at last, Eleazer's course was fully decided upon. He intended, as stated, to run away and thus rid himself of the whole responsibility.

How he succeeded we will presently show. We must now turn our attention to Tryphena.

She was sitting in her little room adjoining her shop, and actually weeping, when a woman, a neighbor, chanced to enter.

That woman was Mrs. Dan Gilbert.

"Why, Tryphena, my dear," she exclaimed, "what on earth is the matter?"

Tryphena was fairly caught, and as Mrs. Gilbert was one of her best friends, she made a clean breast of the whole affair.

"An' don't th' ungrateful critter pay not th' least 'tention to ye, nor let on what he'll do?"

"No," Tryphena sobbed, "he don't. He loves me, I *know* he does, but he is so sensitive because he is a little smaller than most men. And I love him, oh! I do love him so! Why, if you can believe it, Mrs. Gilbert, I have spent every cent of my profits from pills and porous plasters in writing letters to him. I wouldn't mind it so much, but he commenced to make love first, and he won my heart before I knew it."

"Did he do that?"

"He did, Mrs. Gilbert. He used to pass my window going to and from his work, and flirted with me desperately."

"Poor dear! and now he will not pay any attention to you."

"No, he will not even write one little word."

"Oh! the rascal! And you are sure you love him?"

"Love him! I love him with all my heart."

"And you think he loves you?"

"I am sure he does."

"Then you shall have him! You jest go right on, Tryphena, an' fix fer th' weddin', an' I'll see to it that Mr. Brown is on hand. You have th' preacher here, an' all ready, an' I'll fetch th' man. He may mean ter come anyhow, though, for he did not go to work as usual this afternoon, an'—"

"What! Did he not go to work?"

"No, he—"

"Oh! then he will come, I *know* he will," the delighted little maid cried, and she sprung up at once, brushed away her tears, and began to prepare for the great event as mentioned.

But, as mentioned also, Eleazer was making different arrangements, and we left him inquiring about the next train for Denver.

He was not long in ascertaining, and just before train-time, which was also the hour set for the wedding, he shouldered his worldly goods and set out for the station, clad in his best.

He was taking a back street, in order to meet as few people whom he knew as possible.

He had not gone far, however, when he was met by Mrs. Dan Gilbert.

"Why, Mr. Brown," she exclaimed, "where be ye goin'?"

"I'm off for Denver," Eleazer answered, as he tried to get by.

"Now you look here, Eleazer Brown," said Mrs. Gilbert decisively, as she stepped in front of him, "you ain't off for no sich a place at all.

You're a-goin' right along with me to Tryphena's house, an' marry her."

"Corraled, I swear to goodness!" Eleazer gasped in a despairing tone, and his face turned pale and his legs trembled.

He knew Mrs. Dan Gilbert well enough to know that he was hopelessly lost. He had seen her "manage" her husband many a time, and had seen her "get away" with Ben Down, and knew that he would stand no chance at all.

"She'd git away with a little cuss like me in jest two seconds," he quickly reasoned, "an' I may jest as well give right up."

"Yes, sir, you're corraled," Mrs. Dan assured him, "so come right along."

"Jest as you say," Eleazer retorted, faintly, and he changed his course and his intentions at the same time.

Now Eleazer had been watched.

When he did not appear at the mine that afternoon, suspicion was aroused at once, and his interested friends set one of their number to watch him.

After the day's work was over, several more joined in the task, and so when Eleazer met Mrs. Gilbert, and went with her to Tryphena's house, the news was quickly spread.

When Mrs. Gilbert and Eleazer entered the house, Tryphena rushed forward, caught the little man in her arms and fairly lifted him from the floor, exclaiming:

"Oh! my dear—dear Eleazer, I knew you would come!" And she covered his face with kisses.

"Corraled! corraled as sure as guns!" Eleazer gasped. "I knowed jest how 'twould be, an' here it is."

"What do you say, deary?" Tryphena questioned.

"I said go on with th' performance," Eleazer answered.

A preacher was right at hand, and in a very short time the knot was securely tied.

"At last," cried Tryphena, then, as she stooped and laid her head upon her husband's manly breast, "at last I am your wife, your *wife*!"

"An' I'm mighty glad of it, too, now that th' business is done," Eleazer confessed, as he embraced his wife and heaved a sigh of relief that suggested a heavy load removed from his mind: "I am, I swear to goodness! Things was gettin' desperate, an'— But, Tryphena, dear, how's yer heart now?"

The happy bride responded with a glad, girlish giggle that it was now safe, and then invited all present into an adjoining room to supper.

While all were at the table, there came a sudden hurrah from a hundred throats in the street before the house, the beginning of the wildest and most enthusiastic serenades the town had ever witnessed.

Eleazer and Tryphena were obliged to appear and reappear repeatedly, and the uproar was continued until a late hour.

Eleazer's chief tormentor was there, and he was the high horse of the crowd.

"What did I tell ye, Ele?" he shouted, at the first appearance of the happy pair. "Whar is th' five dollars I've won?"

Eleazer settled the bet immediately.

Next morning the "*Silver Nugget Screamer*," the leading paper of the town, contained the following:

"MARRIAGE BELLS."

"BROWN—MARKS.—At the residence of the bride, last evening (September 24th), by Rev. Ole O. Burr, Mr. Eleazer Brown to Miss Tryphena Marks, both of this town. No cards.

"Our best wishes go out to the happy couple. The bride, a most amiable and cultured lady, has for some time carried on business here, and has made herself so valuable to the community that we sincerely trust the duties of her new venture will not interfere with the duties of the old. As for Mr. Brown, he has got only what he deserved; for if there is a man upon earth who has not an enemy, and who never did a willfully wrong or malicious act, that man is Eleazer Brown. We wish them all happiness, and hope that in due time their union may be blessed with numerous little Brown—Marks."

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE FATE OF SULPHUR SAM.

ANOTHER progressive stride, and we are forward into the final week of September.

The great day, Saturday, October 2d, is at hand, almost.

Affairs at Silver Nugget, to all outward appearances, remain much the same.

Rainbow Rob has not been recaptured, and it is the opinion of the citizens in general that he is not likely to be.

No other clue to the murder of the old postmaster has been found, and no other person is suspected—by the public.

In the parlor of the Lawrence residence the two heroines of our romance were seated.

It was about mid-afternoon.

Claudia, pale and grief-stricken, was dressed in black.

They were talking about the horrible murder.

"No," Claudia was saying, "I do not believe him guilty, and I am glad he escaped."

"And so am I!" cried Lulu. "But," she added, "I wonder where he can be? It is strange he does not let any of his friends know."

"He has to be careful, you know," Claudia

observed. "Mr. Lawrence seems to think he is not far away, you know, and so does Alvin."

"Yes, I know; and I more than half believe they know more than they tell us."

"That is just what I think."

At that moment a servant came in bearing a letter.

"A letter?" queried Lulu; "whom is it for?"

"It is for you," the servant answered, as she advanced and placed it in her hand.

"Where did you get it?"

"A boy left it only a moment ago."

"That is all."

Having dismissed the servant from the room, Lulu tore open the envelope and drew forth the sheet it contained.

She glanced at once at the signature.

"Why," she exclaimed, "it is from Rainbow Rob—I mean Mr. Ransom!"

"Is it? What does he say?"

"I will read it aloud."

The letter ran as follows:

"MONDAY, Sept. 27, 1880.

"MISS LAWRENCE:—

"I have something very important to say to you and Miss Madison, but of course I dare not venture into town, nor do I wish to put it on paper. Will you and Miss M. meet me to-night at sunset, at the first clump of trees south of the Eagle Mine? This is not far from town and you can reach home before dark. I expect no reply, but shall look for you at the place and time named. Please assure Miss M. of my entire innocence.

"Your friend,

"ROBERT RANSOM."

Lulu and Claudia looked at each other for several moments before either spoke.

"What do you think?" Claudia presently inquired.

"I hardly know what to think," Lulu confessed. "Do you think we ought to go?"

"I do not know. See, though, there is something more on this side of the sheet!"

"So there is."

It was a brief postscript, and it ran thus:

"P. S.—You must come alone. You need have no fears, for I can protect you."

"Why does he want us to come alone?" Lulu questioned.

"He is, no doubt, afraid of being captured."

"He shows little confidence in us, then."

"I think so, too."

"Well, shall we go?"

"I dare not decide. Here comes your papa, though. Suppose you show him the note and ask his advice."

"Just the ideal!"

In a moment more Mr. Lawrence entered the room.

"Papa," Lulu said at once, "read this, and then tell us what to do."

"What is it?" the judge asked, as he took the note from her hand.

"It is a letter from Robert Ransom."

"Ah! is that so?" and the old gentleman adjusted his glasses and read it eagerly.

"What ought we to do?" Lulu urged, impatiently.

"You ought to go, by all means," the judge decided at once.

"But, papa, he says we must come alone."

"No matter—go."

"Suppose it is not from him, though, but is a trap to lure us away. Suppose it is the work of that road-agent?"

So Lulu urged, and at the thought both she and Claudia trembled.

"I do not believe it is, but you should go anyhow. You will be well mounted, and you can go well armed, as well. Who can say but that the young man can give you a clue to the murder? Go, by all means."

That decided the matter, and they resolved to go.

When it came time for them to start, Lulu ordered the horses, and then arming themselves each with a revolver, they set out.

"It is a risk for them to run," Judge Lawrence mused, as he watched them depart, "but the trap is perfect, and the two rascals are sure to be taken."

From this it will be seen that Rainbow Rob had not been idle.

He had managed to be present at the second interview between Sulphur Sam and Ivan Oswald, and had learned the details of their plot.

Then he at once opened a communication with Sheriff Barkmore, through Alvin Howe and Detective McDonald.

The result was, an almost perfect snare for Sulphur Sam and the other villainous rascal.

And all this was known, of course, to Judge Lawrence, as we learn from his own words.

The Eagle Mine was not more than a mile from town, and just south of it was a clump of trees, as mentioned in the decoy letter.

And in that direction the two girls rode.

Not being in the secret, they could but act their part naturally.

When they arrived at the appointed place the sun had set, and the shadows were just beginning to deepen.

They paused at a little distance from the trees and looked around.

No one was to be seen.

The next moment, though, a voice was

heard in the shadow of the trees, telling them to ride on.

"Who are you?" Lulu called.

"I am Rob," was the answer, and at the same time a horseman, with a white hat not unlike the one worn by the Tulip, appeared at the edge of the clump.

The voice, too, sounded like Rainbow Rob's, and thus reassured, the two girls rode on.

At the moment they reached the trees, though, another horseman appeared before them.

This one was Sulphur Sam.

With drawn revolvers, then, the two laid hands upon the bridles of the girls' horses.

"Utter one sound," said Sulphur Sam, coolly, "and you both die. We will stand no nonsense."

Both men were masked, and of course the girls knew not that one of them was Ivan Oswald.

"What do you mean by this outrage?" demanded Lulu, fiercely. "Release your hold from that bridle instantly!"

"Or die!"

The words came from half a dozen men at once, and as many revolvers were aimed at the rascals' hearts.

These men had seemed to spring up right out of the very ground, so quickly and so unexpectedly did they appear upon the scene, and Ivan Oswald was so startled that he was made a prisoner before he could think of resisting.

But not so Sulphur Sam.

His revolver spoke instantly, two men fell before him, and amid a shower of bullets he was away in a moment like the wind.

And he would have escaped, too, with only a few slight wounds, had not this very occurrence been foreseen and provided for.

But escape he did not.

No sooner was he clear of the clump of trees than the sheriff's posse, mounted and armed, spurred out from a little ravine a short distance away and started in hot pursuit, calling upon the outlaw to surrender.

Sulphur Sam's answer was a shot, which toppled one of the deputies from his saddle.

The next instant half a score of carbines were leveled and fired, and the outlaw and his horse were brought to the ground.

With a yell of victory the sheriff's men spurred on, but the next moment another of their number fell.

Though mortally wounded, the black rider was resolved to sell his life dearly.

A volley of revolver-shots followed instantaneously then, and literally riddled with bullets, Sulphur Sam fell dead across the body of his dying horse.

In the mean time a pair of handcuffs had been clapped onto the wrists of Ivan Oswald.

"Ivan Oswald," Sheriff Barkmore said, as he then tore the mask from the rascal's face, "I arrest you for this attempted abduction, and for the murder of Henry Madison."

"It is a lie!" the prisoner screamed, as he struggled desperately to free himself.

"I guess we can prove it to be true," the sheriff remarked.

It was a surprise for all, to find one of the masked men to be Ivan Oswald, the proprietor of the Colorado House. That is, it was such to all those not in the secret.

And it was more of a surprise when the sheriff charged him with the murder of the old postmaster.

"Who says it is so?" the prisoner cried. "Who dares to charge me with such a crime?"

"I do, and dare," answered a voice, and Rainbow Rob, the Tulip from Texas, stepped forward and stood before him.

"You!" cried Oswald, "you are a prisoner yourself!"

"I was such," was the calm reply, "but I have proven myself guiltless, and am now free. Ask the sheriff."

"It is true," Barkmore confirmed.

"And he says that I am the murderer?"

"So he says and so he can prove."

"It is a lie, a lie! and I demand a hearing at once!"

"You will no doubt get a hearing to-morrow. To-night you will stop with me."

True it was, Rainbow Rob was free. In disguise he had been right in town almost all the time since his escape, acting the part of a detective, and he had found a clue that led straight to Ivan Oswald as the real murderer.

This point settled, Rob had an interview with the proper authorities, and had been discharged.

For proof against Oswald he had several points, one of which was the impression of his thumb in the stain of blood, as before described.

By a clever trick, as soon as suspicion pointed toward him, Rob managed to get another impression of his thumb in a ball of wax, and the two were precisely alike.

But this proof was held a secret, and was reserved for the examination.

The sheriff ordered his men to look after the bodies of their fallen comrades and that of the outlaw, while he returned to town with the new prisoner.

Rainbow Rob caught one of the riderless horses, and mounting, rode back to town beside Lulu Lawrence and her friend Claudia.

And as they rode along he related all that had taken place.

"Oh! we did not for a moment believe you guilty!" exclaimed Lulu, earnestly, "but we never dreamed that it would be Ivan Oswald. What can have been his object?"

"That," was Rob's reply, "is to be told later."

When they reached town, they parted for the time, and Judge Lawrence was glad to see the girls return safely.

Ivan Oswald was lodged in jail, and when the news of his arrest, and the death of Sulphur Sam, became known generally, the excitement in the little city scarcely knew any bounds.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

ESCAPE AND CAPTURE.

NEXT day Ivan Oswald was examined, or had his "hearing."

And it was before the same justice who had granted Rainbow Rob's discharge, upon the strength of the proof he had shown of his innocence of the crime.

One of the first witnesses called was the night clerk of the Colorado House.

He testified that no one except the proprietor himself, and he the clerk, had a key to admit him into the house at night after it was finally closed.

Next, he testified that he had been out on the night of the crime, telling where and why, and proving it to the satisfaction of all. He had gone out after closing the house for the night, a little before midnight.

When he returned it was about two o'clock. He entered the house by way of the front main door, and went at once to his room.

He had barely reached his room when he thought he heard some one else enter the house.

Curious to know who it was, and wanting to know what was going on, he being responsible for the safety of the house, he stepped out of his room and slipped down to the first landing.

By the dim light in the hall below he beheld Ivan Oswald, the proprietor, and satisfied that all was right he went quietly back to his room.

This proved that at that hour both of those having night-keys were in the house, and that no one else then out could have entered later without forcing a lock.

Rainbow Rob proved that he had retired long before midnight.

A chambermaid testified to finding blood-stained water in Ivan Oswald's room on the morning of the crime.

He explained that by saying his nose had bled during the night.

The maid remarked that it must have bled a quart.

Another servant testified that the proprietor rose at an unusually early hour that morning, and built the fire in the kitchen range; a thing he had never done before.

When he, the servant, came down at his usual time, Oswald cursed him for sleeping so late.

The servant called attention to the fact that he was not late.

Thereupon Oswald glanced at his watch, and said he had made a mistake in the time.

The servant said there was smoke in the kitchen, and a strong smell of burnt cloth, and that he afterward found a great many buttons in the ashes.

A dozen persons testified that on that day Oswald had appeared in a different suit of clothes, and the suit he had formerly worn had not been seen since.

Throughout all this the prisoner sat silent and pale.

And, last of all, Rainbow Rob was called to give his testimony.

It was given in a clear and straightforward manner.

He knew nothing about the murder until he was called up by the sheriff and arrested. He did not know how the blood came on his door and on his sleeve. He suspected that the murderer had entered his room to throw suspicion upon him. When arrested, he requested to be shown the trail of the blood, and also the victim. Under the rear window of the post-office, in a spot of blood, he found the imprint of a human thumb. He cut off a sliver from the sill and kept it. It was shown and identified by Sheriff Barkmore and Dan Gilbert.

After his escape from jail, he returned to town in disguise to ferret out the mystery. His suspicion fell upon the proprietor of the Colorado House. He learned all the facts that had been given by the witnesses, and by a clever ruse he succeeded in getting an impression of Oswald's thumb on a ball of wax. This and the one in the blot of blood were shown. Both were made by the same thumb.

No further proof was needed, and the prisoner was sent back to jail, charged with the crime.

And later on, seeing how hopeless his case was, he confessed.

Henry Madison, he explained, had, as he believed, some papers which he desired to see.

His only chance for seeing them was to enter the house at night and search for them.

This he did.

He entered by the rear window into the post-office. Thence made his way up-stairs. He was searching for the papers in Mr. Madison's room

when the old man awoke and saw him. Without a second thought, he, Oswald, drew a knife and threw himself upon his victim and killed him.

Then the horror of his crime rushed upon him and he hastened from the room and the house, and rushed home.

Not until he was in the hall of his hotel did he realize that he must have left a trail of blood behind him, and then instantly came the idea to throw suspicion upon some one else.

The first one he thought of was Rainbow Rob.

Going at once to his room he let himself in silently with his pass-key, the other key happening to be out of the lock. Rob was asleep. As silently as a shadow the murderer moved, put his knife into the chimney, and then even ventured to touch the sleeping man's sleeve with his bloody hand as he went out.

He took particular pains to leave no stains of blood elsewhere, and went at once to his own room and washed. Next morning he burned his blood-stained clothes in the kitchen range.

What the papers were that he risked so much to see, he would not state.

And on that day, too, Sulphur Sam was buried, as were the unfortunate men who had fallen by his hand.

Next day Rainbow Rob led a party to the outlaw's cabin, which he had discovered, and there a great deal of booty was recovered.

Sam's hired man was told of his master's death, of course, and he at once took his departure for a more wholesome section.

On the following Friday night, at a late hour, the bell of the jail was heard ringing loudly, and all who heard it jumped up to learn the cause.

Those who lived nearest learned first, of course.

The prisoners had escaped!

There were six or eight in all, among whom were Ivan Oswald, Jim Hogan and Mike Kinnie.

In a few minutes the town, or that portion of it, was up and in arms.

Here was the confessed murderer of Henry Madison at large, and all the other cut-throats the jail had contained.

They must not—they *should* not escape!

They had got out by a clever ruse, evidently following the example set them by Rainbow Rob.

Oswald had managed to communicate with Jim Hogan, and had given him the outline of a plan.

At a late hour Hogan was taken desperately ill, and made such a fuss that the jailer hastened to his assistance.

No sooner had he opened the cell door, however, than Hogan was upon him, and he was borne to the floor with a force that rendered him for a time insensible.

Then instantly Hogan snatched away his keys and in a few moments all the prisoners were free.

But they were not destined to escape, although it was by a rare piece of good luck that they were taken.

It was some time before the jailer came to and gave the alarm, and by that time the prisoners were well out of town, and pursuit would have been useless.

But as it happened, Sheriff Barkmore and his men had been over to Bonanza that evening and were returning.

They were within a mile of town, their horses at a walk, when they came suddenly face to face with the jail-birds.

Even then they might have passed on, in the darkness, but for the folly of Mike Kinnie, for they might have escaped recognition.

But Mike made their identity known.

"By thunder, th' sheriff!" he exclaimed, and his voice was recognized instantly.

"Hands up!" cried the sheriff, "or we'll drop you!"

Some obeyed, but two tried to escape.

The sheriff had now rode near enough to identify them beyond doubt.

"Stop!" he cried, "or we will fire!"

"Fire, and be hanged!" Jim Hogan shouted back.

The order was given instantly, several shots rung out, and Jim Hogan and Ivan Oswald were brought to the ground, the first dead, and the latter badly wounded.

It was all done in a few brief moments.

In a short time the prisoners were secured, the wounded one was cared for, the dead one was laid across the back of one of the horses, and then the sheriff and his party went on.

Ivan Oswald was seriously wounded, and was taken at once to his own room in the hotel, where the sheriff stationed a guard, and where he was given the best medical aid the town could afford.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE SILVER CASKET OPENED.

SATURDAY, October 2, 1880.

The day dawned clear and bright, and all who were interested in the silver casket were full of impatience for the hour to arrive.

On the first train down from Denver came

Mr. Jabez Howard, Mr. Andrews and Mr. Wilson.

These repaired to the Colorado House at once.

When the hour drew near, the first interested persons to arrive were Mr. and Mrs. Eleazer Brown.

Tryphena had not told Eleazer the secret yet, but had merely requested him to accompany her.

Eleazer's face beamed with smiles, and to all appearances he was happy. And Tryphena—well, that *she* was happy goes without saying.

The next to arrive were Judge Lawrence, Lulu and Claudia Madison.

A short time later came Rainbow Rob and Alvin Howe.

The living heirs of old Barton Lawrence were all present.

At a quarter to ten Mr. Howard, Mr. Andrews and Mr. Wilson entered the room.

It was with not a little surprise that Rainbow Rob and Alvan Howe were regarded by Lulu and Claudia, while Eleazer and Tryphena were looked upon with surprise by all.

After a whispered consultation among Mr. Howard and the English lawyers, Mr. Wilson rose and inquired:

"Are the ladies and gentlemen present the heirs of Mr. Barton Lawrence, who died in New York on October the second, 1780?"

All except Eleazer Brown answered in the affirmative, and he sat and gazed upon his better-half in amazement.

Being assured, Mr. Wilson went on and addressed them at length.

He recounted all that is known to the reader concerning Mr. Barton Lawrence and his peculiar will, and then continued:

"The remainder of his wealth Mr. Lawrence invested in guaranteed English sureties, sealed his certificates in a silver casket, or caused them to be so disposed of, and that casket was to be opened on the one-hundredth anniversary of the day of his death. To-day is the day. The value of that investment now, owing to a whole century having passed, is about nine million dollars. And it is to be divided equally among those who can prove their identity as Barton Lawrence's descendants. Let me add, however, that unless that silver casket is produced, and those certificates are shown here and now, this vast fortune will go to the British Crown."

"Whoever has the silver casket, let him now bring it forth."

A pause followed, and all present looked at one another.

It was a moment of fearful suspense.

Then the door opened, and entered the room—the Spot Saint from Scarecrow.

Advancing at once to a table in the center of the room, he placed his old carpet-bag upon it. Then he opened the bag, and from it took the silver casket, placing it in the hands of Mr. Howard.

Mr. Howard rose at once and said:

"I, Jabez Howard, the authorized custodian of the silver casket, am, thanks to my detective, enabled to deliver the casket to be opened."

The casket was then handed to Mr. Wilson.

"One moment, gentlemen," the Spot Saint then interrupted. "Mr. Ivan Oswald, the proprietor of this house and murderer of Henry Madison, and who is about dying, desires to be carried into this room to witness the opening of the silver casket. Will you admit him?"

After a moment's debate the permission was granted, and the dying man was carried in on a stretcher.

"Mr. Howard," said the Spot Saint, then, "allow me to introduce Mr. Ivan Oswald, proprietor of this hotel; otherwise, Mr. Basil Howard, who stole the silver casket from you five years ago."

"Ha! you know me?" the dying rascal gasped, as he tried to raise himself up.

"Yes, I know you."

"And who are you?"

"I am Martin McDonald, a New York detective."

Basil Howard fell back with a gasp.

"It is true," he said faintly, "I—I am Basil Howard. I—I—" but he was too far gone to say more.

Jabez Howard had risen and crossed over to where the dying man lay, and as he looked down upon him he said, with suppressed passion:

"Basil Howard, if you were not dying, I would curse you. You are unworthy of the name you bear!"

If the dying man's face pictured the remorse he felt, he was punished enough.

"I—I—I—" he gasped, trying to speak; but his strength was gone, and in a minute more he was dead.

The body was quickly carried from the room.

"This is very sad," remarked Mr. Andrews, "but we must proceed with the business we have in hand. Mr. Wilson, you will please to open the silver casket."

"Will it not be well first to examine the proofs of identity which these heirs bring?" Mr. Wilson suggested.

"Perhaps you are right. We will attend to that first."

This occupied some time, but at last it was done, and the identity of each one was found perfectly established.

Rainbow Rob had sent for the papers necessary, while Detective McDonald had provided proof sufficient for Alvin Howe.

When all was finally arranged, Mr. Wilson took up the silver casket.

"One hundred years sealed and locked," he remarked, "and now to be opened for the first time. One whole century! Why, it was sealed before my grandfather was born!"

It was indeed a wonderful event.

Mr. Wilson broke the seal, and then taking the key from the handle where it was secured, turned it in the lock.

Then putting the casket down on the table he invited all present to step forward and see the lid raised.

All obeyed, and the casket was opened.

On top of all lay a slip of paper containing these words:

"Intrusted to my friend, Franklin Howard, and by him to be sealed on the day I die."

This was read aloud, and then the lawyer took up another paper.

That read as follows:

"NEW YORK, Sep. 15, 1780.

"TO MY HEIRS:—

"Know by this that though I am dead, yet do I live. I am with you as these words fall upon your ears. It is my will that each of you shall have an equal share of the wealth I have left to you. I hope you are all honorable men and women."

"At this critical period I have little faith in American Independence. It is a futile effort of the child to subdue and defy the parent country. The rebellion is certain to be crushed, and the leaders hanged. Such being my opinion, I have invested my remaining wealth in English sureties. Full instructions have been given, interest will be added to principal for the one hundred years, and at the end of that time lawyers will be sent to you, empowered to deliver the wealth to you. Also, communication will be carried on with the custodian of the casket from time to time."

"But, enough. When these words greet you the end will have come."

"BARTON LAWRENCE."

Then there was another note, thus:

"TO THE FAITHFUL CUSTODIAN:—

"My thanks to you. It is my will that the endowment made by me for your use shall now become yours in fact, principal and interest, to do with as you will."

"BARTON LAWRENCE."

Then came the valuable papers.

The sureties were so arranged that they could be divided into any number of equal portions, and the division was soon made.

Then all the legal formalities were observed, and each heir was put into possession of his and her share.

Each was made worth a million and a half.

It was almost past belief, but that it was true could not be doubted, and the joy of the heirs can hardly be imagined.

Tryphena caught Eleazer up in her arms and gave him a squeeze that made his joints crack, exclaiming:

"I knew it, Eleazer, and that is why I was so determined!"

"God bless ye, Tryphena," Eleazer replied, "you're a trump! you are, I swear to goodness!"

Explanations then followed.

Detective McDonald, the "Spot Saint," told the story of his long hunt, and an interesting story it was. To give it here would be to crowd our romance out of all limit. Let a few explanations suffice. He it was who had played "ghost," and the appearance of the skeleton apparition was due to luminous paint. In getting into the hotel office, to take the casket from Basil Howard, he had found it easy to pick one of the locks, the noise of the file being so loud as to drown any sound he might make in so doing. Afterward, the silver casket had reposed most of the time in his old carpet-bag. His final success, however, as he at last declared, was due wholly to Rainbow Rob.

Rob tried to deny this, but McDonald instantly began to pile up proof that could not be disputed, and Rob came in for a full share of the praise.

And to him was given, by general consent, the empty silver casket, which was a souvenir not to be despised.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

FINALE.

At last the business of the day was completed, and the heirs were in possession of their fortunes.

The lawyers instructed them how to proceed, in order to have the wealth transferred to America.

And, next day, the lawyer, Mr. Howard, and the detective, all set out to return to New York.

It had been a wonderful case, and it had been brought to a successful close.

Later, when Rainbow Rob's actual business in Colorado was transacted, the truth came out that he, too, was a detective.

He was a special officer, on the State staff of Texas.

The business that had brought him to Silver

Nugget is foreign to the interest of our story. Let it suffice to say that it was detective business, and that it was successfully carried out.

This accounted for his frequent trips to Denver.

With such fortunes at their command, however, he and Alvin Howe gave up business at once.

A few weeks later they started for England, with power of attorney to act for the other heirs, too, and in due time each heir had his or her fortune in hand.

And it is needless to add that good use was made of it by them all.

A year later there was a double wedding at Silver Nugget.

Robert Ransom and Lulu Lawrence were one party, and Alvin Howe and Claudia Madison the other.

The reward, by the way, that had been offered for Sulphur Sam, was divided among the families of the men who had fallen by his hand at the time of his capture.

Seven years, almost, have now passed since the time of our story.

It may not be out of place to speak of our friends as we find them at this time.

"Silver Nugget,"—for of course we gave the town a fictitious name, for obvious reasons—is now one of the most promising little cities in the State.

And there reside, first, Robert Ransom and his pretty wife, Lulu, and their three lovely children.

Judge Lawrence is still there, a hearty man, doing his best to defy the march of years.

Besides there are also Alvin Howe and Claudia, with their little family.

And no happier persons are to be found anywhere, than all these mentioned. They do not live for themselves alone, but their wealth makes happy all who have any claim upon their friendship, and a host of others besides.

Jabez Howard is dead.

At his death he willed all his possessions to Martin McDonald, the detective.

The latter still lives in New York.

Dan Gilbert and Mrs. Dan still live at Silver Nugget. Dan, occasionally, still claims to be the "long-clawed," etc., etc., but on such occasions Mrs. Dan still proves herself equal to the emergency.

John Barkmore, too, still lives there, and has since served one term as mayor of the town.

Basil Howard, or "Ivan Oswald" as he was best known, is buried there, side by side with Samuel Dunton, or "Sulphur Sam."

No stone marks their graves, and in the course of years even their dishonored names will cease to be remembered.

The grave of Henry Madison, on the other hand, is well-cared for constantly.

And Tryphena and Eleazer? Ah! No happier couple ever lived.

Their life seems one continual honeymoon.

Tryphena is as proud of her little husband as any fond wife can be, and Eleazer is more than proud of her.

"Did I not tell you I would love you all my life?" she sometimes asks.

And Eleazer answers:

"You did, Tryphena, and I was a fool. I was, I swear to goodness!"

And the good wishes expressed by the *Silver Nugget Screamer*, at the time of their marriage, has been realized. Several "little Brown-Marks" now bless their union.

The "Green Bottle" yet flourishes, with Jerry Lynch still its proprietor.

And so does the "Colorado House," which some of Basil Howard's relatives came forward and claimed.

THE END.

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